The State of the Church

Rev. Andrew Murray

"DONT'S" FOR READERS.

(1) DON'T Read with Dirty Hands, or at Meals, or leave the Book open

(2) DON'T Read over a Fire. or leave the Book in Strong Sunlight.

(3) DON'T Turn Down the corners of leaves, Think of the Next Reader.

(4) DON'T Pull the Books from the Shelf by the Back Binding.

(5) DON'T Leave Books lying about within reach of the Baby or the Dog.

(6) DON'T Forget to Return Book when Read

R. Stuart Gibson.
March, 29th 1930.

BRITISH NAZARENE COLLEGE
WITHDRAWN
MANCHESTER 20.

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

M981s

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

A PLEA FOR MORE PRAYER

BY

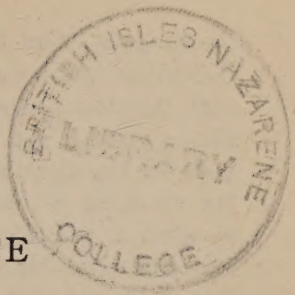
REV. ANDREW MURRAY, D.D.

AUTHOR OF
"ABIDE IN CHRIST" "LIKE CHRIST" ETC.

FOURTH EDITION

3332

London
JAMES NISBET & CO., LIMITED
22 BERNERS STREET, W
1912



PREFACE

NOT long ago Dr. J. P. Forsyth published two volumes in which he sought to give the Cross the place it ought to have in our theology, our preaching, and our life. The one was a series of lectures delivered at Yale University, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*; the other *The Cruciality of the Cross*. I was so impressed by the deep importance of the truth he sets forth that I began making extracts, with remarks, having in view the directing of ministers and students to his teaching. And I also wished to point out what a wide application there was in these truths to the state of the Church, as revealed in many of his thoughts.

In *The Cruciality of the Cross*, I found this passage: "The New Testament represents a grand holiness movement; but it is one which is more concerned with God's holiness than ours, and lets ours grow of itself by dwelling on His." It suggested to me as a title for my book: "The Holiness Movement in Heaven and on Earth."

As I began thinking and writing about the state of the Church and its relation to the Holiness of

the Cross of which Dr. Forsyth speaks so strongly, the World Missionary Conference came in between with its strong declaration that the state of the Home Church was such as to prove itself utterly unfit for the work that God put before it. I was led to think of adding chapters on this subject to what I had already intended writing. But I had not gone far before it became plain to me that it would be better to publish the papers having reference to the Conference and its lessons separately and at once. Whether the first part will be published will depend very much on the reception that this little book meets with.

I am deeply conscious of the defects of my work. I cast it on the forbearance of my reader, and on the mercy of God. I send it forth because I believe that the book has a message from God for His people, and I shall not cease to pray that He may bring it to all for whom He has a blessing through it. May the call to repentance and prayer and a new consecration reach many hearts.

A. MURRAY.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE STATE OF THE HOME CHURCH. And the verdict of the World Missionary Conference	1
II.	THE PRESENT CRISIS. A voice from Scotland	8
III.	THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM. How the Church is to be lifted to a higher level	15
IV.	"PEACE, PEACE, WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE." Healing the hurt slightly	23
V.	"WHY COULD WE NOT CAST HIM OUT?" Three witnesses: Mr. Moody, Dr. Forsyth, Mr. F. B. Meyer	30
VI.	THE SUPERNATURAL. The one condition of a change	37
VII.	CHRIST'S LAST WORDS. The enduement of power	44
VIII.	PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY. Is what they had, meant to be ours?	51
IX.	SEVEN TIMES MORE PRAYER. A call from the Conference	58
X.	A HOLINESS REVIVAL. Absolutely essential	66
XI.	CHRIST'S CLAIM UPON US. The way to a full surrender	74

CHAP. PAGE

XII. THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER. The one thing needful 81

XIII. THE UNITED FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND. At the bar 89

XIV. CONTRITION. CONFESSION. CONSECRATION. The way to power 96

XV. REPENT! The Lord's call from Patmos . 103

XVI. THE VALLEY OF DECISION. The Place of Blessing 112

XVII. THE MINISTRY. And its responsibility . 121

XVIII. A PLEA FOR MORE PRAYER. Our only hope 128

XIX. FEAR NOT, ONLY BELIEVE. The assurance of Faith 135

XX. A PERSONAL WORD. At parting . . . 142

HINTS ON INTERCESSION 149

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

CHAPTER I

THE STATE OF THE HOME CHURCH

The State of the Home Church. — These words have through the World Missionary Conference received a new meaning. One of the outstanding and abiding results of that remarkable gathering has been the new and vivid picture presented to the Church of the world-wide need of the Gospel message, and the world-wide opening there was for the bringing of that Gospel to every creature; and then at once the question arose, **Will the Church be able to enter these open doors?** It was clearly seen that the **State of the Home Church** was an all-important factor in the possible solution of the great questions which were raised by the Conference.

Indeed, before the Conference itself assembled,

in the very first papers that were issued calling for prayer on behalf of the Conference, it was pointed out that everything would depend on the **Home Base** for Foreign Missions: that is, on the fitness and readiness of the Church to respond to God's call. It is well worth our while to read again some of the sentences from that first call to prayer. "As we contemplate the work to be done, we are conscious that the fundamental difficulty is not one of men or money, **but of Spiritual Power. The Christian experience of the Church is not deep, intense, and living enough, to meet the world's need.** The end of the Conference will be attained only if it lead to the more perfect manifestation by **the Church of the Spirit of the Incarnation, and of the Cross.** The only hope of the Church being able to meet the opportunity is, that there should be **a new vitalising of the whole of the Church. . . . This quickening of the whole life of the Church** is indeed a great thing—an impossible thing, we are tempted to think. But does it seem so impossible when we get the conviction that God, being what He is, wills it? It does not seem so impossible when we saturate ourselves in the thought of the Gospels, with their repeated teaching, '**Ask and ye shall receive.**'"

In the *Reports of the Conference* we find the same thoughts expressed in different words. Thus in Vol. I., "Carrying the Gospel," we

read under 3A, "The missionary problem of the Church to-day is not primarily a financial problem, but it is how to **ensure a vitality** equal to the imperial expansion of the missionary programme. **The only hope of this** is for Christians to avail themselves of the **more abundant life** through Christ, bestowed in the pathway of obedience to Him."

Again, "A crucial factor in the evangelisation of the non-Christian world is the **state of the Church** in Christian lands. Until there is **a more general consecration on the part of the members of the Home Church,** there can be no hope of such an expansion of the missionary enterprise, as to result in making the knowledge of Jesus Christ readily accessible to every human being."

Once more: "The most direct and effective way to promote the evangelisation of the world is to influence the workers, and indeed the whole membership of the Church, **to yield themselves completely to the sway of Christ as Lord,** and to establish and preserve at all costs **those habits of spiritual culture** which ensure lives of a Christlike witnessing and spiritual power."

The Introduction to the Report on "The Home Base of Missions" (Vol. VI.), on its very first page speaks of securing, above all else, "such a spiritual atmosphere throughout the Church, that **the very temper and spirit of Jesus Christ shall live**

anew in the hearts of all His followers, and that through them His life may flow forth to the world lying in darkness."

This is further emphasised in the first chapter, which opens thus: "The subject which has been entrusted to the Commission drives us back at every turn to the question of the **spiritual condition of the Home Church. Has that Church sufficient vitality for the tremendous task to which it is called?** We realise that the fundamental problem is that of the deepened sincerity of the **religious experience of the Church,** the quality of its obedience, the intensity and daring of its faith." At the close we read: "There can be no forward movement in missions, no great offering of life, except as these are attained through **a deepening and broadening of the spiritual life of the leaders of the Church, and a real spiritual revival among the members.** New methods can accomplish nothing unless begun, continued, and completed in prayer, **and permeated from first to last with the Holy Spirit of God.** Back to Divine wisdom, to the living power of Jesus Christ, back through prayer to the source of all power, must be the watchword of all Missionary Societies, **of all the leaders of the Church, and ultimately of the entire membership,** if the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ is to be carried out. We therefore recommend that every endeavour be made **to propagate the spirit and habit of prayer among all**

Christian workers, old and young, confident that when the entire Church shall devoutly pray for the coming of the Kingdom, the triumph will already have been achieved. We must make men understand that it is only their lack of faith and half-hearted consecration that hinders the rapid advance of the work, only their own coldness that keeps back His redemption. We must ever bear in mind that He is eager and able to save the world already redeemed by Him, if only we, His professed followers on earth, were willing that He should. We are frank to confess that it is futile to talk about making Christ known to the world unless there be a great expansion of vitality in the members of the Churches of Christendom. That this is the will of God, that the most remote human soul shall have the opportunity to know Jesus Christ as his personal Redeemer, there can be no doubt; that the opportunity and means are sufficient we are all aware; the work halts only because the entire Church is not yet in full submission to His will."

Other commissions see and speak of the same great need in the use of words such as these. Co-operation, if it is to lead to unity, necessitates a spiritual revival, which must be in its very nature supernatural; the reinforcements needed depend on the spiritual state of the Churches which are to supply them; the very religions which Christianity is to replace teach her that her own life must first be lived on the supernatural

plane, the power of a living faith in a living God.

"If our missionaries are to be fitly and fully prepared 'to convince the world,' they must go forth from a Church in which the Spirit of Christ is evidently at work, **in whose whole policy and character and life the Gospel is continuously and irrefutably proved** to be in very truth the power of God unto salvation." Let me beg every reader, be he minister or member, to look back and take in the thoughts which have been expressed in reference to **the state of the Church,** until he comes to realise the intense solemnity of what that state implies, of the place which God calls her to take, and what is needed if God and the world are to find her ready for the work that awaits her.

Here, spread out before us, lies a world dying in its need of the very message which the Church of Christ alone can bring. This world in its need is accessible and open for this message as it never has been in the ages past. The Lord Jesus Christ, having laid down His life to redeem this world, waits still for that message of His redeeming love to be brought to those for whom He died, and His Church has not the power, nor vitality, nor consecration, which would make it possible for her to fulfil her blessed task.

If the plea for more prayer for that revival which is so much needed is to be attended to by

God's people, if that prayer is to be effectual and much availing, the state of the Church as it has been described must become an unbearable burden, and we must learn to give ourselves no rest, and to give God no rest until He make His Church a joy in the earth.

CHAPTER II

THE PRESENT CRISIS

UNDER this title an article appeared in *The Missionary Record* of the United Free Church, October 1910, written by the Moderator of the Assembly. He begins by alluding to the fact of the serious decrease in the last years, both in the membership of the Church and in the number of young men offering themselves for the ministry. He points out what a sad proof it is of the lack of vitality in a church, what reason it gives for humiliation before God, and what a call it is to the Church to discover the cause of the evil and its cure. In the course of his remarks he gives expression to a thought of the deepest meaning in these words: "Membership in the Church implies that the measure of Christ's surrender for our salvation is the **only true measure of our surrender to Him and His service.**"

The thought is one of unspeakable solemnity. **Is it really true** that Christ's devotion to God and to us in the sacrifice of the Cross is to be the measure of our devotion to Him, and to the service of His Kingdom? It must be true. And

yet how few Christians there are who take time to think it out. One almost feels as if the minister who uses such an expression, and has the vision of what it means, could have no rest until he had lifted up his voice like a trumpet and called to the Church, "Awake, ye Christians, to your high calling: The measure of Christ's surrender for you and your salvation," let that be your study until you realise somewhat of its meaning, and then let your heart respond and say: "Nothing less, by the grace of God, shall be the measure of my surrender to the person and the service of this beloved Redeemer."

If a thought like this could take full possession of even a small number of Christians, what power there would be in their witness to others of what Christianity really meant. What hope there then would be to rouse the Church to find out, and to confess, what the cause is that in Scotland the membership of the Church and the supply of students for the ministry is so sadly decreasing.

The article closes with an appeal to all members of Kirk-Sessions and Presbyteries, to all ministers and Church members to renew their exertions on behalf of true godliness, and to labour that the young people may be brought to the knowledge of Christ, and to such a surrender to His service as that suggested above. And have these men, then, not been doing this? There is no reason to doubt it. But what is needed is the discovery that the low spiritual life which prevails through-

out the Church is the true cause of the alarming diminution in the membership.

"The measure of the surrender of Christ for us and our salvation,—the measure of our surrender to Him and His service." If that is indeed to be regarded as the standard of **membership,** how much more ought it to be the standard of the life and the preaching of the **minister.** God has put an unspeakably solemn responsibility on the ministry. The whole tone of the Church, the whole thought of the membership, depends upon what rules the thought and heart and life of the minister. If the membership is to be lifted out of the worldly level, of which this decrease in the number of communicants is a token, who are to do it, if not the ministers? The God Who has entrusted to them "the ministry of reconciliation," is the God Who by His Holy Spirit wrought in Christ the consecration that made Him give Himself a living sacrifice. That God will work a similar consecration in His servants when they fall before Him in the confession of their impotence and sin. It is for the ministry special prayer must be made, asking God to give them the vision of the great truth—one measure of devotion to the salvation of men in Christ and in His ministers. If once this vision comes to them they, as the appointed leaders of the Church, may be able to guide her in the way of repentance and restoration.

The present crisis.—It is not only in Scotland but in more than one of the denominations in

England, that the same alarming disease has appeared. There is, indeed, a crisis throughout Christendom. The World Missionary Conference has brought matters to a head by the intensity with which it has announced its conviction that the Church in its present state is utterly unfit and unprepared for the great work that God has put before it, and expects it to undertake. Just listen to some of the voices that were heard there.

Professor Cairns asked: "Had the Church within itself at this moment the spiritual resources for so high and arduous calling? **His profound conviction was that she had not.** They were moving up to a situation which was too hard for them, and for which they were not yet ready. And so the matter of **most urgent moment** before the Church, which dwarfed all others, was how they could obtain from the Eternal God those spiritual reinforcements of His grace which would make them able to meet the coming hour."

Professor Denney said: "I speak only of the Church to which I myself belong, but something similar I believe is true of almost every Church in Christendom. The United Free Church has 1700 congregations, and during the last five years the average increase in its membership has been about 850; that is to say, every second congregation in the Church has added one, and every other congregation has added none. The number of candidates for the ministry at the present time is less than it was a good many years ago; it is hardly a sufficient

number to keep up the staff at home, to say nothing of supplying men for abroad. Men are not coming forward as ministers, nor coming forward as missionaries, **because they are not coming forward into the membership of the Christian Church at all. Something must happen to the Church at home,** if it is going even to look at the work that has been put upon it by this Conference."

And among the very last words of Dr. Mott in closing the Conference were these: **"I make bold to say that the Church has not yet seriously set itself to bring the living Christ to all living men!"**

These statements are simply appalling. The Church of Christ not able to hold its own,—actually defeated and driven back by the enemy! Rich in the promise of the Father, she is nevertheless, in spite of her perfection of organisation, unable to gather in more than one soul to every two congregations.

Have we not reason to say with Joshua when he fell on his face before the ark of the Lord, "Alas, O Lord God! Lord, what shall I say, after that Israel hath turned their backs before the enemies?" The story of Joshua will give us the key to the question as to what is to be done to remove this terrible reproach on the Church of Christ. God's answer was, "Israel hath sinned, therefore the children of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. I will not be with you any

more, except ye destroy the accursed thing from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, O Israel, thou canst not stand before thine enemies until ye take away the accursed thing from among you."

Something must happen to the Church at home. What can it be but that God's people must fall on their faces before the Lord to confess the defeat with shame and humiliation; to discover what it is that prevents God from giving that power and blessing with the word which would give us the victory over the world; and individually and unitedly to put away the accursed thing which makes it impossible for God to reveal His presence in power in the Church as He longs to do?

"Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow." Israel was to be reminded that God is the Holy One, and that sin is the only thing that can rob us of His presence; that they are a holy people with whom holiness is the one secret of power and of blessing. Joshua had used the words when they were about to enter Jordan, "Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow." God would again reveal His Divine power in teaching them to discover and to cast out the sin that had been the cause of defeat.

It is this that must happen to the Church if she is indeed to listen to the call for the army of God to move on to the great world conquest.

The more we study these extracts from the Conference Reports, the deeper comes the conviction that nothing less is needed than that we take our place with Joshua and the elders on our faces before God. There He will give us such a discovery of the state in which the Church is as shall bring us to the end of all our hopes and plans. There we shall be brought in utter impotence, and in humble, importunate prayer, to beseech Him to visit ministers and people with such a revelation of sin on the one hand, but on the other, of the all-sufficiency of His grace to cleanse us and to make us holy, as shall give Christ His place as the leader of the Lord's hosts on the path of victory. Nothing will so teach a backsliding Church that comes to repentance, what the love of Christ is, as the exercise of His power in cleansing and delivering from sin. It is the experience of what He can do for ourselves that will rouse the true loyalty to follow Him as He leads us in the path of victory.

CHAPTER III

THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM

THE one object of the World Missionary Conference was to take all the problems connected with missionary work and to strive so to solve them as to form the basis of a missionary science in which all the Churches could unite. And by all accounts the attempt has met with wonderful success.

And yet the chief and the most difficult problem of all has not been solved. Every question in regard to the organisation of mission work at home and abroad has been answered, but it is admitted that the most important problem of all is, **how the Church is to be roused** to that deeper and fuller life in Christ, without which there is no possibility of Christ being made known to all the world in this generation. The Conference appears to have thought that this question must be left to the Churches themselves. And yet one cannot but think that the Conference might have spoken out with great authority and power, suggesting to the Churches how to begin, and what to do, for kindling the enthusiasm with-

out which the aim of the Conference cannot be attained.

In Dr. Mott's book, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions*, he devotes the first three chapters to a survey of the field, and the indication of what the hopeful signs are as well as the threatening dangers that urge to immediate action. Chapter IV. bears the title, "The First Great Requirement: An Adequate Plan." After pointing out the almost insuperable difficulties which have to be overcome, ere the thought and life of whole nations can be changed, he asks, "How is such a seemingly impossible task to be accomplished?" and gives the answer that the first essential is, that the Church should have before it a plan, adequate in scope, in thoroughness, in strategy, and methods, to meet the situation. The chapter is devoted to point out the main features of such a scheme.

If the task that the Church has in the mission field is so difficult, that it cannot be undertaken without an adequate plan, as the very first requirement, what are we to think of the far harder task to which the Church at home is called, of rousing Christians out of their apathy, and training them to become the devoted servants of Christ, full of enthusiasm for the King and His Kingdom? In a previous chapter we saw how strongly, almost hopelessly, the Conference thought of the present state of the Church. They have stated the problem with terrible clearness,

but left it unsolved. They have not given us any plan for the campaign, and as yet there is not much indication that the Churches as such are girding themselves for this work of supreme importance. The leading of Christians on to that deeper and intenser vitality, to that more abundant life in Christ, without which the work cannot possibly be done, is a question of life or death.

It is with the greatest diffidence that I venture to make some suggestions as to what is needed if the Churches are really to gird themselves for the task that the Conference has left to them.

1. We shall first of all have to set clearly before ourselves and others, what the true calling of the Church is, and of every believer. **Christ expects that every one that knows His love shall tell of it.** Christ claims that every one who is made partaker of His redemption shall yield himself, **as the first object of his existence,** to live for the coming of His Kingdom. Christ asks and expects that, just as the loyal subjects of a king are ready in time of war to give their life for the kingdom, so His redeemed ones, in the power of His Spirit and His love, shall live not for themselves, but entirely for Him who died and lives for them.

As long as these thoughts are counted too high, and are not accepted as the very groundwork of the relation between Christ and His Church and every member of it, our attempt to

lift the Church into the more abundant life will be in vain. Unless God's children can be brought to accept of this standard and to count such a life their highest happiness, and to believe in the power of Christ to work and maintain it in them, there will be little hope of that intense vitality without which the Church cannot fulfil her calling.

2. A second step will be the discovery of what the real cause of the evil is, its terrible power over us, and our utter impotence to overcome it. It will not be enough that we confess that we have been unfaithful to Christ's charge, and that it is our guilt that men are perishing in darkness. We must go deeper than this. We must ask how it comes that, with our faith in Christ, there has been so little love to Him, and the souls He has entrusted to us, that we could imagine that our religion was pleasing to God, while all the time we were grieving our Lord by the neglect of His last and most cherished commands. We shall find that, at the root of all, lies the selfishness that sought and looked to Christ for our own personal salvation; the worldliness that kept us from living in the power of His death and resurrection; and the self-satisfaction that rested content with a religion which was for the greater part in the power of human wisdom and in the form of godliness. We shall have to be brought to the conviction that there is an entire revolution in our inner life

needed: the God on Whom we counted to bring us out of Egypt, in conversion and pardon, must bring us, by a still more mighty experience of His grace, into that life of the New Covenant in which God will dwell with us and walk with us.

3. Who is to take the initiative in all this? Shall it be a Conference, which, just as the Edinburgh Conference did with regard to the Foreign Field, seeks to master and formulate all that is needed in connection with the spiritual work? Or can we count upon each Church considering the question separately, and giving time in its Assembly, or Council, or Congress, to deal with this subject as one of the most important that could be brought before it, and then leading the way in that deep humiliation and fervent supplication which is absolutely essential, if the longed-for change is to come? Or shall it be left to individual men to gather around them small companies, to begin the work of confession, and of intercession for the power of the Holy Spirit through Whom alone the supernatural quickening can be wrought?

4. And who are to be the agents in carrying out this work? We all naturally think of the ministers as God's messengers, who have been given by Christ, "to perfect the saints for their work of the ministry in building up the body of Christ." Paul felt how absolutely he was dependent on the prayers of believers. Let us

begin at once and beseech God that He would raise up men in the ministry, with the courage of their convictions, to sound the call to a new repentance and the new consecration, and in the boldness of faith to tell what Christ is going to do for the Church if it will but yield to Him.

But we shall not only need to look to the ministers, but to encourage every Christian who is seeking in earnest to serve Christ, to take part in the great Crusade for winning soldiers for the Lord's army. There are many who are longing for some one to lead them out into a life of liberty and devotion to Christ, which they have seen from afar, but have never yet been able to attain. Let men and women take courage and speak out, telling those around them what happiness there is in a life spent for Christ, and what certainty of strength there is to be found in Him.

As those who have already taken part in the great work of intercession for missions begin to pray importunately for the quickening of the Church around them, some hearts that have hitherto been content with the hope of heaven as the one aim of their Christian life, will begin to waken up to the attraction of Christ's claim, as it is brought to them by living witnesses around them, and God will most assuredly hear prayer and give His blessing.

5. "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the

breath came upon them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." In the plan of campaign everything depends upon the supernatural; upon the all-sufficiency of God; upon His infinite love and power, yielding Himself to be led by the prayers of His children to the place where His Spirit is to descend, and to the work that He is to do. Nothing less is needed than a new creation, a resurrection from the dead, bringing forth out of carnal, worldly Christians the new creature in Christ Jesus, in which old things are passed away, and all things are become new. Nothing less than this is to be our aim and expectation. And the more absolutely we believe that God alone can, that God most surely will, quicken the dead, the more simple and unceasing will be our persistent importunate prayer that God Himself will do for us what to human thought appears impossible.

6. One word more. Let us never forget—**everything begins with and depends upon the individual.** Let no one who hears the call of God to this new consecration wait for the Church, or wait for his brethren. Let him offer himself with his whole being that Christ may be magnified through him. Dear fellow-Christian, begin at once, and give God no rest **until Christ has the place in your heart which He claims.** Let devoted loyalty to His Kingdom be the fruit of intense attachment to His person. Let His

love become a holy passion, and let Him find in you one upon whom He can count to seek above everything and at any sacrifice, that His name may be made known to every creature.

Depend upon it: God will use you to lift others around you into the fulness and the fruitfulness of the abundant life in Christ Jesus.

God grant that the unsolved problem may find its solution in the fervent prayer of His believing people!

CHAPTER IV

"PEACE, PEACE, WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE"

DURING the last ten years there has continually come from one or another Church the tidings of a decline in the membership. This has gone on till now it is said that there is hardly a Church in Christendom which is not suffering from the same cause. The disease is becoming chronic. One wonders that no Church has set itself in downright earnest to examine into the cause, and that none of the leaders of the Churches have given the alarm and called upon the whole Church to cry to God for the discovery of the root of the evil and the secret of its removal. In the spirit of the deepest humility and love we express the fear that the prophet's words are but too applicable: "They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."

Two years ago the President of the Baptist Churches said: "To me it is questionable if any Church is doing much more than marking time." That means—effecting nothing, making

no advance. "The atmosphere is impregnated with influences unfavourable to religious life." But was not that much more the case in Corinth and Rome? And yet the power of the Holy Spirit brought the very atmosphere of heaven, the power of the resurrection-life into those Churches. And then, after mentioning many of the elements unfavourable to the religious life, he concludes: "Meanwhile, in my judgment, we have hardly touched bottom"—only then we can go no lower.

In an article this year on the Baptist and Congregational statistics and the reports of the decrease in England, Scotland, and Wales the writer says: "The figures are unquestionably disappointing, though there is no reason for serious depression." But may it not be that that "serious depression" is just what God wants, and what is essential to the full conviction of the evil as looked at from the Divine standpoint? The writer tells how that "in both bodies there is an increase **in the number of the churches** in the year, 84 Congregationalist and 18 Baptist. In both bodies there is a marked increase **in the number of Sunday-School teachers**, but **the scholars are fewer** by 3869 among the Congregationalists, and 2794 among the Baptists. Considering the greatly increased activity in various organisations, the result falls short of our hopes." The churches have increased by 102, and there is a marked increase

in Sunday-School teachers, and yet the membership has decreased by some thousands, and the Sunday-School scholars by more than 6000. Does it not suggest the thought that to build churches and increase the number of Sunday-School teachers is what man can do, while for the increase of the number of members and Sunday-School scholars we need a spiritual vitality in the ministry and the Sunday-School teachers which none but the Holy Spirit can give?

And yet it is to be feared that in these and in other Churches people are afraid of nothing so much as "serious depression." Men say that in business or finance there are also times of depression. But they do not always last. A change comes, and business prospers again. We must keep up our courage and hope on. But are we not in danger of forgetting one thing? When the depression has to deal with trade and money, every man who is concerned is ready with his whole heart to do anything he can to bring about the change. But this, alas! is just what is not the case in the Church. How few there are who with their whole heart yield themselves to the power of the spiritual life, and do their utmost for the winning to Christ of the souls that are drifting away from Him and His Church.

The article mentions that it has been stated that out of the seven millions of scholars only

about one-fifth ultimately connect themselves with the Church. What a thought! That five million Sunday-School scholars should be entrusted to the Church for three or four years of their life, and yet the Church is powerless to influence them to become its members. If there is one problem which is worthy of the highest Christian statesmanship among our Church leaders, and that needs the deepest waiting upon God for the enlightenment and the courage of His Holy Spirit, it is this unspeakably solemn one. How are these more than five millions of young people, whom the Church is now unable to influence, to be reached and won? The solution lies with God alone and with the men who are willing honestly to face the situation, who know what it is to have access to Him, and to receive from Him the teaching and the power of the Spirit.

The chief suggestion in regard to the whole difficulty that is given in the article is contained in one word: work. "There have been too many Conferences and meetings to discuss work —it is better to do the work. The minister is to be pitied who does not know what he ought to do in his sphere of labour. He is most deeply to be compassionated if he does not know the source of true strength." And yet this last is just the crucial question. Judging by what is written and spoken, it is just the lack of that much and intense prayer, that living faith, which is the

cause of all evil. God's promise is too sure; the lack of conversions, the decline in membership, the lapse of Sunday scholars, all indicate that the power of God is little known. And nothing can be more dangerous than to tell men to work if their method of work is not what it should be. If I meet a weary pilgrim on the wrong road and try to encourage him by telling him that he must go bravely forward, he still will be able to go a long way before evening, I am deceiving him. I ought to tell him he is on the wrong road, and show him where to find the right one. The article has told us: "Considering the greatly increased activity in various organisations, the result falls far short of our hopes." The activity may be twice or three times as great; if the worker has not learned to make the supernatural, with its life in prayer for the power of the Spirit, his chief desire, all our work will be vain. No leader could do a greater kindness to the Church than to help all its ministers to a full apprehension of the presence and power of the Spirit. When our ascended Lord spake the words, "Ye shall be My witnesses to the ends of the earth,—wait, tarry, till ye be endued with power from on high," He gave a law for all time to His servants in regard to the secret of work. The Spirit received daily in fellowship with God is the only secret of successful work.

In the correspondence that followed on the article, more than one writer suggests that there

are other causes than those that had been named! One mentions: "The lack of intimate Christian fellowship within the churches, thus offering but very small inducement to earnest souls. This defect grows out of the **lack of spiritual life**, and the prevalent neglect of Holy Scripture and its exposition." 2. "In preaching, **the lack of the note of personal appeal to the conscience and direct effort for conversion**; largely a result of the same cause" (the lack of spiritual life). 3. "In many of our Churches the great underlying doctrines and facts of the Gospel **are scarcely ever referred to.**"

The question cannot be answered by the simple assurance that every minister knows what he ought to do. How many there are who have been doing what they could, and yet have failed. Let us not call it disparaging the Church when we invite our brethren to test their work with its failure, by the Word of God. When a medical man tells a husband that his wife is suffering from a dangerous disease, he does not disparage that wife; he is doing the greatest kindness as the first step towards healing. When Spurgeon spoke so boldly about the down-grade, he was only warning against what has actually come to pass. There are thousands of hearts that feel deeply that the Church of Christ is in sore straits. Let us beware of everything like "healing the hurt slightly"; or saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace."

But let us rather listen to the word, "Let my eyes run down with tears, for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a very grievous wound." In listening to that Word of God we shall find healing.

CHAPTER V

"WHY COULD WE NOT CAST HIM OUT?"

THE disciples felt ashamed at their not being able to cast out the evil spirit. When Christ had sent them out to do the work, they had come back rejoicing that the evil spirits were subject to them. And here, in presence of the Pharisees, they had been brought to confusion by their impotence. They felt it deeply, and asked the Master to tell them what the cause of failure was. He answered with one word, Unbelief; they had not been living in communion with God and separation from the world;—they had neglected prayer and fasting.

It is when the Church begins to feel the shame of the decline in membership as the loss of a power that she had in time past, and confesses that it is beyond her reach to find the cause and the cure, that she will learn to bow in penitent prayer for the Master to reveal to her the depth of the trouble, and the only way out of it.

In this chapter I want to call up three witnesses among the servants of Christ, to give evidence as to what they think of the state of

affairs. Let the first be D. L. Moody. In the *Christian* of 24th December 1897, there appeared a letter to the *New York Independent* on the subject. He refers to a statement in a previous issue of that paper, "that there were over three thousand churches in the Congregational and Presbyterian bodies in the United States that did not report a single member added by profession of faith during the year." Mr. Moody then adds, "Can this be true? The thought has taken such hold of me that I cannot get it out of my mind. **It is enough almost to send a thrill of horror through the soul of every true Christian.** Are we all going to sit still and let this thing continue? Shall we not lift up our voice like a trumpet about this matter? **What must the Son of God think of such a result of our labour as this?**"

In answer to Mr. Moody, the *Independent* explains that some allowance must be made for the new churches founded within the year, for small churches without a pastor, and for others that have failed to send up any report. The editor expresses his disagreement with what Mr. Moody had said in his letter about modern criticism and other causes of the evil. And then he proceeds: "But with all this true, Mr. Moody does well to be astonished and pained at the thousands of churches which reported not a single member added by profession of the faith last year. **It is enough to send a**

thrill of pain through the soul of every true Christian."

Let us pause ere we read on and say, What ought all this to mean to the Church?

Let Dr. Forsyth be the second witness. In his book, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, he writes thus: "It is reported from most quarters in England that there is a serious decline in Church membership. For this several explanations are given. But it is well to face the situation, and to avoid extenuation, and if we do we may discover that the real cause is the decay, not in religious interests or sympathies, **but in personal religion of a positive and experienced kind, and often in the pulpit.** Religious sympathies or energies are not Christian faith. We have become familiar with the statement that there is as good Christianity outside the Churches as in. This is not quite false, but it is much more false than true. It would be true enough if Christianity meant decent living, nice ways, precious kindness, business honour, ardent philanthropy and public righteousness. But all these fine and worthy things are quite compatible with **the absence of personal communion with God,** personal faith as Christ claims it; in the sense **of personal experience of God in Jesus Christ, personal repentance,** and **personal peace in Christ as our eternal life.** Yet that is God's first charge on us, if Christianity be true. And it is this kind of Christianity which alone makes

for a Church and its membership. Decay in membership of the Church is due to a decay of membership in Christ. Even among those who remain in active membership of our Churches, the type of religion has changed, the sense of sin can hardly be appealed to by preachers now, and to preach grace is in many (even orthodox quarters) regarded as theological obsession, and the wrong language for the hour, while justification by faith is practically obsolete.

"The grace of God cannot return to our preaching, or to our faith, till we recover from what has almost clean gone from our general, familiar, and current religion, what liberalism has quite lost—I mean a due sense of the holiness of God. This holiness of God is the real foundation—it is **certainly the ruling interest of the Christian religion.** Have our Churches lost that seal? Are we producing reform, social or theological, faster than we are producing faith? We are not seeking first the kingdom of God and His holiness, but only carrying on with very expensive and noisy machinery a 'kingdom-of-God's industry.' We are merely running the kingdom, and running it without the Cross. We have the old trade-mark, but what does that matter in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, if the artesian well on our premises is growing dry?"

Let us take to heart the lesson: It is the lack of positive personal religion, sometimes even in the pulpit, that explains the decline of membership.

Our third witness is the Rev. F. B. Meyer. In an address on Acts xix. and the anointing power of the Holy Ghost, he says:—

"There are four different planes of power—the lowest is the physical, above that is the mental, above that is the moral, and above all is the spiritual. It is only when the man moves on the spiritual level that he has power with God, and has power over unclean spirits.

"It is because too many ministers and too many Christian workers to-day are content to live upon the intellectual level, or upon the moral plane, that their work is impotent to touch the mighty stronghold of Satan.

"The first question, therefore, to put to every Christian worker is: On what level are you working, on what level are you living? For if you are speaking on anything less than the Spirit level, know that your life will be largely a failure."

He then tells the story of how the sons of Sceva had tried to cast out evil spirits in the name of Jesus whom Paul preached, of the answer that the evil spirit gave, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" and of the evil spirit leaping upon them, and mastering them so that they fled naked and wounded, and then proceeds: "Oh, where are we? We have been praying that God would send converts to the Churches, and stop this awful ebb; **still the people are leaving our Churches, and the pews are empty. We**

have no additions, or few, to our Churches, and, pray as we may, we cannot avert it. Why? why? because the devil does not fear us. We have no power. The devil masters the Church and masters the world, and here are all we powerless, and he says, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; who are ye?'

"You remember the words of our Lord: How can you enter into a strong man's house until you have bound the strong man? We cannot spoil the house, because we have not bound the strong man. We have not bound the strong man in our own house. **We do not know what it is to master the power of evil in our own hearts.** How then can we rescue the men who are led captive at his will? It seems to me we have got to get back to prayer. O God, forgive us for our prayerlessness! God knows what a prayerless people we are. I do not wonder at things being as they are."

Let us learn the lesson. The decline in membership is nothing but what may be most naturally expected where the work is not done in the power of the Spirit and in prayer. The spirit of darkness that rules in the world, and with its mighty attraction draws men from Christ and His Church, is too strong for us. Nothing and none can give the victory but the Spirit of God working in us. Would not one imagine that God's servants would be delighted to think that they have such a Divine power working in them,

and with their whole heart yield to its influence? Oh, let us turn to the Master to give us, into the very depth of our hearts, the answer to the question, Why could we not cast this evil spirit out? Because of your Unbelief. You did not believe in Me and in the power of My Spirit, and with prayer and fasting seek for it.

CHAPTER VI

THE SUPERNATURAL

"CHRISTIANITY is nothing if it be not supernatural." It is only where that is fully realised and acted on that the true Church can flourish. Let us try and understand what the word teaches us in connection with our study of the state of the Church.

It teaches us, first of all, that Christianity is a **religion that came down from heaven and has still unceasingly to be received from there.** It is ever dependent on the extent to which its believers yield themselves to the immediate operation of the Divine power. It points to God the Father and that unceasing action by which He works out everything according to the counsel of His will even to its minutest detail. He is the God Who worketh all in all. It points to Christ the Lord to Whom all power has been given that, just as He wrought His mighty works on earth, He may now live out and may live over again in His people the life that He lived on earth, and in the power of His resurrection do even greater works than He then did. It points to the Holy

Spirit, proceeding unceasingly from the Father and the Son, and continuously working out in us God's plan according to the exceeding greatness of His power in us who believe.

Just as Israel was brought out of Egypt by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm amid great and mighty wonders, so now still the Church is upheld and guided by the omnipotent action of the Three-one God. And that not only in regard to the great events of her history or special interpositions in her experience, but in the care for every individual life, for all the work that is done from hour to hour by the feeblest of His servants. Christianity is nothing if it be not from the beginning to the end, through all and in all, the hidden but direct and mighty energy of the living God continuing and working out the great redemption which He accomplished in His Son. Beyond all that He has given in Creation and Providence, is that special exercise of the power of the Divine life in its infinite holiness which ever worketh in us that likeness to Himself which is pleasing in His sight.

The word teaches us more. We learn from it what the disposition and attitude ought to be of man towards God His Redeemer—**absolute and unceasing dependence.** The more faith in the revelation of the supernatural, as we have it in God's Word, is brought into exercise, the more we shall learn that the first of our virtues is to be a deep fear of God, a holy reverence in the presence

of His glory, a consciousness of our impotence under the sinful accursed state which marks everything that is of nature. Humility and a sense of nothingness is the posture that becomes us. Faith in what God can do, will do, is always doing, and is waiting to do still more abundantly, becomes the unceasing habit of the soul, as unbroken in its continuity as the breathing of our lungs. What at first appeared a difficulty becomes a deep joy, the spontaneous surrender of the heart to the mighty working of God and His life within us.

To some the supernatural may appear unnatural It is simply because they have never understood how the supernatural may become in the true sense most natural. As natural and joyous as our breathing, can be the movements of our spiritual life when God is allowed to take perfect possession. But for this there is needed the consciousness of how little our natural mind or heart can take in this Divine working. We need to learn that to know what the Divine power can work in us is beyond the reach of human wisdom. As supernatural as is the redemption and its almighty action in our life, must be the revelation of that redemption. From beginning to end the work of grace is all, and always, and in all things, the presence of God working and dwelling in us.

The word teaches us still more. The more fully we yield ourselves to it, the clearer will be the discovery that **all the defects in our Christian**

life and in the Church around us are owing to this one thing, **that we have not taken our true place before this glorious God** to work out in us what He has promised. In the Church the question is evermore coming up, What can be the reason that Christianity has so little true power and so little fulfils all the wonderful promises that it makes? Read all the discussions that are going on, notice carefully all the plans and efforts that are suggested for enabling the Church to exercise the power it ought to have, and to influence men, either the masses of nominal Christians, or the millions of the heathen, and you will everywhere find how the thoughts and plans centre in what man's wisdom can devise and his zeal and energy can accomplish. Everywhere there is the thought that if men will only keep up their courage and do their work faithfully, all must come right. How seldom the great truth is insisted on, or pressed home, **that the Holy Spirit is our only power.** An entire and absolute surrender to Him is our only hope. How seldom one hears from the leaders, to whom the Church looks for its guidance, the clear and unceasing summons: Brethren, pray. We must pray more; we must pray without ceasing; **Prayer will bring blessing.** The measure of prayer is the measure of power. Every deeper insight into what Christianity is, into what our daily life ought to be, into what the ministry is and needs,

will all lead us to the one deep conviction: Christianity is nothing except it be supernatural. Our Christian life and work must be a failure, except as we live deeply rooted in the power of God's inspired Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the importunate prayer to which the promise of the Father will most surely be given.

All this brings us to the last lesson our word is going to teach us: **There is no hope for the restoration of the Church**, no hope of its being lifted up into the abundant life that there is in Christ, and so to be fitted in holiness and strength for the work that is so urgently calling, of making Christ known to every living creature, except in our return to God. Church of Christ! GIVE GOD HIS PLACE. And take your place of absolute dependence, of unbroken fellowship, of unceasing prayer, of living, confident faith, and see if He will not turn and bless us above all that we can ask or think. "**The one real lack to-day** is a lack of spiritual life; **the one great need**, the realisation of the constant presence and power of the Holy Spirit." "Back to Divine wisdom, to the living power of Jesus Christ, **back through prayer to the source of all power, must be our watchword.**"

How strange that what God meant to be an inconceivable privilege and honour, and the secret of all our strength for the work He has given us, absolute dependence upon Himself,—just as His

Son lived in it, and went to the grave to prove how surely God will work mightily for one that gives himself up wholly to His will,—how strange that this should cost us such trouble to understand and believe! Let the thought teach us the impotence and the incapacity for spiritual things which is natural to us, and bring us in a new surrender to accept of the birthright that belongs to us as His children—the power of a Divine life in Christ through the Spirit.

What we have seen of the state of the Church, as revealed in its neglect and indifference to Missions and its decline in membership, leads us to the inquiry as to the real cause and the true cure of the evil condition. It is all comprised in the one word. Let us hold it fast in our further study. We are naturally so inclined to listen to anything that calls forth our activities, and so ready to undertake the fulfilment of Divine commands in our own strength, that unless we are very watchful we may be deceived into the putting our hope on what will turn out to be nothing but human devices. Supernatural!—Give the word its full force. Let us cultivate with our whole heart such a sense of God's power going to work in us, such an attitude of dependence and prayer and waiting upon God, such a deep consciousness that God will work in us and the Church around us above what we can ask or think, that the deeper we enter into the grievous need of the Church and the world, the stronger

may become the assurance that God is preparing us for deliverance. But remember the one condition,—an habitual, unceasing, absolute dependence upon Him. He must do all. He will do all for them that wait on Him.

CHAPTER VII

CHRIST'S LAST WORDS

WHEN our Lord ascended to heaven He left behind Him three last words. The very last was, "My witnesses to **the ends of the earth.**" We read, "When **He had said this**, He ascended to heaven." He left this world and His disciples with that one word, "The ends of the earth," or, as He had said a little before, "Go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature." With that one word in His heart He sat down upon the throne, "expecting," longing, that every child of man should learn to know Him and His love.

The second word, that had just preceded it, was, **"Ye shall receive power."** As He sent them forth for the conquest of the world, He bade them not think of their own impotence or their own strength, but of all the power in heaven and on earth that He was now to receive from the Father, and that through the Holy Spirit would work in them and give them the victory.

And then we have the first of the three last

words, **"Wait."** "Wait for the promise of the Father." "Tarry in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high." That word "Wait," "Tarry till," they understood so simply that they at once returned to the city and for ten days continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, until on the Day of Pentecost they were indeed baptized with the heavenly fire and all filled with the Holy Spirit and with power.

These three words still express the relation in which Christ on the throne stands to His people. Just suppose for a moment that it were given you to be caught up into paradise, and to see and to hear what men may not know. You would in the light and the power of that Spirit life, where words are eternally existing realities, be permitted to see the risen Lord on the throne, living with this one thought, **"The ends of the earth,"** ever in His heart, and ever listening to the song of the redeemed from every people and nation and tongue. The world God loved, the world for which Christ gave His blood and His life, how He waits and longs for the time when His love can reach every soul.

And you would see what a reality that second word was too, as you saw a "Lamb standing as it had been slain, having seven eyes which are **the seven Spirits of God sent forth unto all the earth."** That holy symbol would show you how the Lamb on the Throne lives to send forth God's Spirit wherever God's servants go, to enable them

to make known His love and win souls for His Kingdom.

And then, that first of the three last words "**Wait, Tarry,**" translated by the disciples into much prayer and supplication — you will find there that "the four-and-twenty elders fall down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls **full of incense which are the prayers of the saints.**" The prayers of men here upon earth have their place and their part before the throne of God. You would see the smoke of the incense in the golden censer with the prayers of the saints going up before God. And you would understand, what it is so hard for us to realise, that the prayers on earth are in very deed the condition for the power from heaven for the extension of the kingdom on earth.

And if in the vision, as you saw that it was passing, you felt bold to say to the blessed One, "Hast Thou no message to give me to Thy people on earth?" you would not be surprised if the answer came, "Tell them in My name to remember My last three words. I carry the ends of the earth, for which I gave My blood and My love, in My heart. Let them do so too. I live on the throne to send forth the Spirit into all the earth. Let them believe My promise, yield wholly to My Spirit, and victory will assuredly come. I am waiting to hear how much they are willing to have and to use; I am longing for more inter-

cession and supplication, for more faith and prayer. Tell them to wait and tarry in prayer, and not to rest till they are clothed with power from on high. Oh, tell them the kingdom, their Lord and King, waits for their prayer."

Shall we not take these last words of Christ afresh into our hearts? Has not God through the World Missionary Conference brought them home to us with a new meaning? Has not the terrible indictment against the Home Church as to her not being fit or willing to undertake the glorious Christlike task of bringing God's love to every creature, pierced some hearts at least? Have not other testimonies as to the state of the Church, its ignorance and its neglect and its rejection of the Cross, its lack of the sense of holiness and crucifixion to the world, its neglect of the blessed truth of the Holy Spirit, its lack of loyalty to the Lord Jesus, its terrible feebleness in prayer—have not these testimonies become to some of us a burden that we cannot bear? And shall we not turn away from all our devices and efforts and give heed, with new, whole-hearted devotion, to the great charter the Church has too long neglected, **the last words of the ascending Lord**? To take the words that live in Christ's heart and let them live in ours, will be the secret of wonderful happiness and irresistible power.

"The ends of the earth." "All the world." "Every creature." Is it possible for the ordinary Christian in everyday life to be so possessed by

these words that, without effort or strain, they shall be the spontaneous expression of his inmost life? Thank God, it is possible, where the love of God and of Christ is shed abroad in the heart. Poor simple men and women have proved it by the intense devotion with which they could sacrifice everything to make the love of Jesus known to their fellow-men. The love with which Christ loves us is a love that takes in the whole world. Of that love we cannot take just enough for ourselves, and be indifferent to all the others who share in it. Such is the feeble, selfish, and unhappy life which so many Christians seek to live. Truly to possess Christ, and fully to enjoy Him, it is essential that we take in His love in all its fulness, that we yield ourselves to the service of that love, and find our happiness in making that love known to those who are still ignorant of it.

When the Church is quickened into some measure of the experience of the abundant life that there is in Christ Jesus, "the ends of the earth" will become its watchword, and men will begin to understand that what fills and satisfies the heart of Christ in heaven is enough and more than enough to fill our hearts with the blessedness and the beauty of likeness to Him. "Remember," He says, "My very last word, as I ascended the throne: **Ye shall be My witnesses unto the ends of the earth.**"

The word that preceded this very last was:

"Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Yes, that is one of the last words: "The Holy Ghost." That was to be the Divine empowerment which would carry them on irresistibly to universal conquest. It would be through suffering and death, through long and patient labour, through many disappointments and trials. But the victory was sure. It has often been said that the Spirit flows from the Cross. The Spirit is inseparably linked to the Cross. In the fellowship of the Cross they could always count upon the fellowship of the Spirit and His almighty power.

But alas, how soon the Church began to shrink from the Cross, and without knowing it began to lose that power of the Spirit without which it was impotent to resist the power of the world. Oh that God would raise up men who could, as with a trumpet voice, sound out this last word of Christ, "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you," and might lead the Church to return to the Cross, with its Crucifixion to the world, and yield itself to the glorious task of carrying the Cross in triumph to the ends of the earth.

Let us beseech our blessed Lord to write in our heart this precious last word too: The Holy Spirit.

And then comes the first of the three last words, **"Wait, Pray."** The Edinburgh Conference has left us the message "that to multiply

the number of Christians who will individually and collectively wield this force of intercession—is **the supreme question of Foreign Missions.** Every other consideration is secondary to that of **wielding the forces of prayer.**" Jesus Christ in heaven waits for our prayers. The world conquest waits for our prayers. It has been said "the essential task of evangelising the world is the lifting up of the Church into a fuller spiritual life." This lifting up of the Church waits for our prayer. Let us above everything beseech God for the Spirit of prayer. Does not the Holy Spirit of God here take the central place in these last instructions of Christ? Without faith in the promise of the Spirit, the Church will fail of her duty, and lose both the courage to pray and to testify through all the earth. Ought not every one who desires to live for Christ and His Kingdom, to beseech God to remove that terrible blindness which hinders men from seeing that there is just one thing lacking in her work—the power of the Spirit, and just one thing required, that she fall down in intense fervent prayer to wait till she be endued with power from on high.

CHAPTER VIII

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

In our last chapter we had Christ's words, in which all the power of God in heaven was promised to the Church to enable it to fulfil the great task that Christ set before it. In proportion to the measure of faith and prayer that power might be counted on. The questions come, How did the primitive Church avail itself of that promise? and, Have we a right to expect its fulfilment in the same measure?

In his *Dawn on the Dark Continent*, Dr. Stewart compares primitive with modern mission work. He writes: "The religious life of the early Christians seems to have possessed some **vitality or concentrated spiritual power** that helped Christianity, possibly because they believed intensely what they knew. Whatever it was, those Christians were successful as unofficial missionaries." "In the Early Church its force and expansive power depended at first, as it still depends, on **its internal condition,** that is, on **its spiritual life.** The Church of our day needs reminding that spiritual enterprises **require**

spiritual conditions of the very highest force. And while the latter are wanting, the success desired may also be wanting."

I make no excuse for giving a whole chapter from Report, Vol. IV., "The Missionary Message," on the difference between the amazing vitality of the Early Church, and the comparative impotence of the Church of our day.

"Christianity supposes an historical revelation. There could have been no Pentecost had it not been for the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. Union with an impersonal absolute has in it no regenerative power. It is distinctive of Christianity that the revelation of God as absolute love and purity in the Cross, and as absolute power in the Resurrection, had to be accomplished before the Spirit was given. But we may say further, that when that revelation had been made, and when it had been realised by the common faith of the Church, Pentecost became divinely inevitable. The dykes of human resistance were broken at last, and the encompassing, waiting, besieging sea of the Spirit rushed in. At last the living Father, through the Son, had found receptive men, and therefore the Spirit was given. Henceforward believing men and women knew that no union with such a God could be too close and too steadfast. Their true life was hidden with Christ in God, and all true progress therein was progress within the absolute revelation.

"Or is this too sweeping a statement so far as the Christian is concerned? Is it, or is it not the view of the Christian revelation, that there is no limit to the efficacy of the Spirit of God in the life of man, **save the measure of faith in those who receive it,** that all limitation and delay arise from the imperfect receptiveness of the Christian Church? . . . What is implied in the promise of the Spirit of God to the Christian Church? How far can we count upon God to sustain and transform us? How near can we come to Him within the conditions of time? How far is it true that He is still literally creative in His world whenever and wherever He finds faith? Are there in Him undreamed of resources of life **awaiting simply the rise of the faith,** as the riches of nature throughout immemorial ages awaited the discovery and development of science?

"When we set ourselves to explain the difference between the amazing vitality of the Early Church and the **comparative impotence** of the Church of our day, three possible explanations suggest themselves.

"The first starts from existing facts, and endeavours to explain the early records in the light of present attainment. . . . The norm of judgment is the Church as we know it, from whom, in truth, the actual life of the heroic age could not have differed in any material degree.

"The second view is that these records of the

first one hundred and fifty years of the Church's life are in substance true history. The contrast between the spiritual exaltation and achievement of that age, and the comparative depression of our own, lies in the fact that for wise and good reasons God has straitened the early gift of the Spirit and put us under a more rigid and limited dispensation.

"The third view, like the second, holds to the truth of the records, but explains the difference between the early centuries and our own by saying that, while God remains unchanging in His grace, the Church has failed to comply with the primal conditions of its reception, that faith has gradually become depressed, and so has lost the expectancy which is the condition of all spiritual achievement. It faces the difficulty as to the failures of prayer to overcome the remaining sin and tragedy in the Christian life, by maintaining that the common faith and love of the Church is so far below the common faith and love of early days that the individual who shares in that common depression cannot attain as yet the ancient summit, and that the true remedy for such failure lies, not in abandoning the enterprises of faith as hopeless, and charging the failure upon God, but in flinging all his energies into the task of rousing the slumbering life of the Church, and awakening it to a new community of faith and love, and in pressing on from that new level to new personal attainment.

"It argues that the idea of God having straitened the spiritual environment of resource has no foundation in revelation, which everywhere assumes that believing men may count upon the Spirit of God with the same assurance as they repose upon the unchanging providence of God. And it pleads that whether it is recognised explicitly or not, the whole missionary movement of the past century rests upon a different foundation, that it began with Carey's "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God," and that its progress hitherto has been measured by the degree of expectancy, which again has depended upon the depth and strength and grandeur of its idea of God. It teaches that if the delay in the coming of the Divine Kingdom be due to a lowering of the common faith of the Church,—a lapse of ages of time, a lapse as wide as the Christendom of the modern world,—if around us to-day in the unseen be all the illimitable potencies of the Divine Spirit which lay around the first ages, awaiting only the rise of a generation stronger in faith and love than our own, then clearly **the one true attitude for the Church is to confess its historic sin,** and gird itself to the most resolute and strenuous endeavour and prayer, that the benumbing mists of our common unbelief may be dispelled, that the redeeming will of God in Christ may have free course in blessing the entire life of man.

"If this view be true, we are attributing to the inscrutable will of God innumerable temporal and

spiritual ills which are in truth contingent on our cherishing thoughts of God which are unworthy of His goodness, wisdom, and power. In this case the whole thought of God is being lowered and darkened by a false theory of His ways with men.

"Is the spiritual environment of Divine resource to-day the same as it was in the early ages? By the very fact that the Church is once more facing its duty to the whole world, it has been led by the Providence and the Spirit of God into circumstances which are taxing her resources to the uttermost. Everywhere the question of our resources is coming to the front. But there is surely common agreement that behind all these things there is an incomparably deeper need. Behind all questions of quantity lies the incomparably momentous question of quality. Nor is it simply the spiritual quality of our missionaries that is the crucial point; it is **the spiritual quality of the Church** which is behind them; the **spiritual temper** of the great masses of the Christian commonalty, their faith, their love, their hopes, their enduement with the Spirit of God. The question arises and presses for an answer, whether at this moment the Church possesses the spiritual resources for the emergency which has so suddenly risen upon her, or whether, like Israel in the days of the prophets, her existing spiritual attainment is not sufficient for the great world emergency which has broken upon her" (p. 266).

With what force all the lessons that we need at this time are taught.

The supernatural power of the Holy Spirit sought and found is the one condition of success in the work of Christ's Kingdom.

That power as it manifested itself in the Early Church is most assuredly available for the Church of our day.

All the feebleness from which the Church is suffering, in the decline of membership and impotence in the fulfilment of her calling, can have no other cause but the lack of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in her services.

How inconceivable that the Church does not know and act upon the blessed truth, that the Holy Spirit will work in her all that she needs of the Divine strength for winning the world.

The plea for more prayer opens the certain path to the power of the Spirit in every work the Church has to do.

CHAPTER IX

SEVEN TIMES MORE PRAYER

IN the reports of the World Missionary Conference very great stress is laid on the supreme importance of prayer. I begin with some extracts. Vol. I., "Prayer is the method which links the irresistible might of God to the missionary enterprise. That God has conditioned so largely the extension and the fruitfulness of His Kingdom upon the faithfulness and loyalty of His children in prayer, is at the same time one of the deepest mysteries, and one of the most wonderful realities." Read that again.

"How to multiply the number of Christians, who with clear and unshakable faith in the character and ability of God will wield this force for the transformation of man — **that is the supreme question of Foreign Missions.** Every other consideration is secondary to that of wielding the forces of prayer. May the call go forth from this Conference to the Christian Churches throughout the world, **to give themselves as never before to intercession.**"

In Vol. VI., "The Home Base of Foreign Missions," the first chapter, pp. 6–16, is devoted to prayer,

and especially the need of education in prayer. "It is our conviction that none can pray their best, few can pray with any fulness of effect, who have not received some careful training in the practice of prayer, and have not acquired as well the grace of holy perseverance in it."

"We must emphasise the fact that the encouragement and direction of the prayer of the Christian people is one of the highest forms of Christian service."

"That those who love this work, and bear it upon their heart, will follow the Scripture injunction to pray unceasingly for its triumph, we take for granted. To such all times and seasons will witness **an attitude of intercession that refuses to let God go** until He crowns His workers with victory."

"Prayer is the putting forth of vital energy. It is the highest effort of which the human spirit is capable. Efficiency and power in prayer cannot be obtained without patient continuance and much practice. The primary need is not the multiplication of prayer meetings, but **that individual Christians should learn to pray.**"

"The secret and art of prayer can only be learned from the teaching of the Master Himself, and by patient study of the best books on the subject." In a note it is said, "Special reference may be made to Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Nisbet, 1s.); M'Clure, *A Mighty Means of Usefulness* (Revel Co., 50c.);

Austin Phelps, *The Still Hour* (Gardner, Paisley); Moule, *Secret Prayer*."

"Sometimes it has seemed as if faith in the power of the Spirit and in His willingness to aid, had been almost lost, and that we were now attempting to substitute human devices for spiritual power. Back to Divine wisdom, to the living power of Jesus Christ, **back through prayer to the source of all power,** must be our watchword. All plans for deepening interest in mission work must be devised and executed in devout prayer and solemn waiting upon the Lord, and every endeavour made to propagate the spirit and habit of prayer among all Christian workers. We must make men understand that it is only their **lack of faith and half-hearted consecration** that hinders the rapid advance of the work, only their own coldness that keeps back His redemption from a lost world. We must ever bear in mind that God is eager and able to save the world already redeemed by Him if only we, His professed followers on earth, **were willing that He should.**"

These are indeed unspeakably solemn words. They lead us into the depth of the sanctuary. They open up to us the Divine meaning and mystery of prayer as very few apprehend it. They call us to beseech God by His Holy Spirit to open our eyes that we may know what prayer is in its spiritual reality.

Most Christians are content if they have some

blessed experience of what prayer can do in bringing down blessings for their own needs, and in some cases on behalf of others. But how seldom it is realised that prayer covers the whole Divine mystery of man's being partner with the three-one God in working out the counsel of His will and grace. All that God wants to do for the world, He does through men whom He has taken up into His counsels, who have yielded themselves fully to His will, of whom His Spirit has taken possession, so that they can pray with power in the name of Jesus. Such have the high honour that God at their bidding will regulate the working of His Holy Spirit, and send Him to go where and to do what they have asked.

This is indeed the mystery of prayer, that a worm of the dust can become one of God's Privy Council. The Holy One listens to such and becomes the executor of their plans and wishes. As Infinite and Omnipotent as God is, is prayer too. Such honour have His saints. No wonder that the chapter we have been quoting from, concludes with the words :—" If the Conference in Edinburgh should lead some **resolutely and irrevocably** to enter into the school of prayer, the spiritual power of the Church for the accomplishment of its great task would be immeasurably increased."

And what is now the bearing of all these extracts on the subject of our book, The State of the Church? First of all, to deepen the

painful conviction of how little the Church knows how to pray, and how unfit the larger part of it is to pray effectually. We need time to come under the full impression of what the Christian life means to most people, even those who are counted earnest. They have been taught to come to Christ for their salvation. They have found it, and now seek to live in the world, looking to God for grace enough to enable them to live what they think Christian lives. **They have no conception of what claim Christ has to an entire consecration of their whole being.** They have no idea that it is definitely their great calling to live to make Christ king throughout the earth. The thought is entirely foreign to them that they are every day of their lives to pray, to labour in prayer, that God's Kingdom may come, and that God's Spirit may use them for His service.

It is as compared with this, the true scriptural idea, that the charge is brought home that the Church is feeble and utterly impotent to strive in prayer for the conversion of the world. I do beseech my readers to look back to all the extracts as to what ought to be, and what is not found to be, until the prayerlessness of the Church become a burden too heavy to be borne.

Next to this must come the surrender of the true Christian at once and wholly to yield Himself to become an intercessor. On the first day of the Conference, when introducing the report of the

first Commission, and speaking of all it would imply even if the work marked out were only to be begun, the late Dr. Robson used the expression "We shall need three times more men, four times more money, seven times more prayer." That is, instead of 20,000 now 60,000 men; instead of five millions of pounds, now twenty millions; and seven times more prayer than is now being offered. If a congregation had at present three labourers in the field, it would not be impossible, if the right spirit prevailed, to increase that number to nine. If there were a Christian man whose income was one thousand pounds, and he had given fifty pounds per annum to Foreign Missions, it would surely not be too much, if a right sense of the claim of Christ came upon Him, to give four times that amount—two hundred pounds. And shall it then be thought impossible to believe that when God's Spirit even now begins to work in the hearts of the children that they shall be drawn out into seven times more prayer?

It is not only that we want the number of those who pray increased, but still more that those who do already pray, should accept the call for their part in the sevenfold. Quality is more than quantity. Sevenfold is the sign of that quiet perseverance of Elijah, which would not rest until the cloud had been seen. Sevenfold is the sign of the burning furnace seven times heated. It is in the new intensity of the prayer of those who already pray that our hope lies. Christ offered

up prayers and supplication with strong crying. But He first offered Himself. **Offer yourself to God,** and a new power will come to offer up prayer without ceasing. Begin at once, and with each chapter of this little book turn it into prayer; take up the great subjects and speak out your heart in intercourse with God. And again, I say, go back to the quotations we have given; make them food for prayer, until the heart begins to understand what it is to give God no rest till He pour down His blessing.

But there is a third point on which the extracts bear still more especially. Their first reference is to prayer for Foreign Missions. But this little book has to do with a subject on which Foreign Missions are absolutely dependent—the spiritual life of the Church. And what the extracts have been specially gathered for is to rouse the hearts of Christians to pray without ceasing for that revival without which the Church can never respond to the call of her Lord. Whether we pray for the whole Church, or the Church to which we belong, or for the district or circle with which we are more closely linked, let our missionary prayer hold up to God as our first and chief desire that His believing children, who have known what prayer is, may be stirred to a new intensity. That will lead them to ask that His feebler children may take courage and confidently expect from Him that to them, too, the Spirit of supplication will be given. And then will follow the prayer,

that His erring children, who profess to trust in Christ, but have never thought of what it is to live for His service, may by the mighty movement of His grace be brought to take their part in the great army, who in the ministry of intercession cry to Him day and night, until He avenge His people of their adversary.

Sevenfold more prayer. May God find His people ready for it.

CHAPTER X

A HOLINESS REVIVAL

IN answer to the question how the Church is to be lifted up to the abundant life in Christ, to that expanded vitality which will fit her for the work that God is putting before her, many will without hesitation say: Nothing will help but a revival. That alone will be that something which must happen to the Church of which Dr. Denney spoke. Or as Mr. Oldham has put it:[1] "If the Conference had any meaning at all, it disclosed a situation so serious that nothing less than **a tremendous spiritual revival** can be adequate to meet it. It is a new and living apprehension of God and of His purpose for the world, that we seem most of all to need, if there is to be that **irresistible spiritual movement** which is the only thing adequate to the needs of the situation. **Great tides of spiritual energy** must be set in motion, if the work is to be accomplished."

Yes, all will answer, nothing less than a mighty revival is needed to rouse and fit the Church for the work to which God calls her. And yet there

[1] In an article in the *C. M. Review* of January 1911.

may be a great difference in what we understand by revival. Many will think of the power of God as it has been manifested in the work of evangelists like Moody and Torrey, and they feel sure that what God has done in the past He can do again. They will perhaps hardly be able to understand us when we say that we need a different and a mightier revival than those were. In them the chief object was the conversion of sinners and, in connection with that, incidentally the quickening of believers. But the revival that we need calls for a deeper and more entire upheaval of the Church. The great defect of those revivals was that the converts were received into a Church that was not living on a high level of consecration and holiness, and speedily they sank down to the average standard of ordinary religious life. Even the believers who had taken part in the work and had been roused by it, also gradually returned to their former life of clouded fellowship and lack of power to testify for Christ.

The revival we need is the revival of holiness, in which the consecration of the whole being to the service of Christ, and that for the whole life, shall be counted possible. And for this there will be needed a new style of preaching, in which the promises of God to dwell in His people, and to sanctify them for Himself, will take a place which they do not now have. Let me try and make this plain by an illustration from the history of Israel. When God redeemed His

people from Egypt, by the blood of the Passover, and the deliverance at the Red Sea, this was but a beginning of what He intended to do. He had a higher purpose and a fuller blessing. He meant to dwell among them as the Holy One, and to be their God, and to hallow them to be His people. We find this twofold aim in the song of Moses (Ex. xv. 13–17): "Thou in Thy mercy **hast led forth** the people which Thou hast redeemed,"—that was the wonderful beginning. Then, "Thou **hast guided them** in Thy strength **unto Thy holy habitation.**" Just as God had said to Moses, "I am the Lord, which **bringeth you out** from Egypt, and I will **bring you in** unto the land," the redemption from Egypt was but the foundation; the house to be built upon it was the sanctuary in which God dwelt in the midst of His people as the Holy One to make them holy too. And yet how many of Israel there were who were brought out from bondage, but never were brought in into the rest; they perished in the wilderness through unbelief.

When our Lord Jesus, in His farewell discourse, gave the promise of the Holy Spirit, He spoke of the great New Covenant blessing that would then be experienced: God dwelling in His people. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and I will love him, and we will make our abode with him." So Paul also writes, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts

by faith, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Dr. Maclaren has said that it seems as if the thought of Christ dwelling in the heart has been lost in the Church. With the Reformation the great truth of Justification, **the bringing out** from the bondage of Egypt, was restored to its place. But the other great truth of Sanctification, **the bringing in** into the land with its rest and victory, has never yet taken the place in the preaching and practice of the Church which God's Word claims for it. It is for this we need a revival, that the Holy Spirit may so take possession of us that the Father and the Son can live in us, and that fellowship with them, and devotion to their will and service, shall be our chief joy. This will be in very deed a Holiness Revival.

A Holiness Revival! Has there ever been such a thing? There have been movements in the Church, sometimes more or less local, which, though they have not been known by that name, have resulted in definite and intense consecration to God and His will. But there have also been fuller manifestations of the Spirit which have left their marks in history. At the Edinburgh Conference mention was more than once made of the Moravian ideal as what the Church ought to aim at,—Every member ready for the work of the Kingdom. That community owed its birth to a true Holiness Revival. At Herrnhut there were gathered together a number of

Bohemian refugees, and along with them a number of Christians of different sects, who hoped there to find the Christian life as they sought for it. It was not long before disputes arose, and Herrnhut became the scene of contention and division. Zinzendorf felt this so deeply that he went down to live among them. In the power of God's Spirit he succeeded not only in restoring order, but in binding them together in the power of devotion to Christ Jesus and of love to each other. More than once they had remarkable manifestations of the presence of the Spirit, and their whole life became one of worship and praise. It was after they had for a couple of years been having their nightly fellowship meeting that they were led to the consecration of the whole body to the service of Christ's Kingdom.

When John Wesley visited them, he wrote as follows:—"God has given me at length the desire of my heart. I am with a Church whose conversation is in heaven, in whom is the mind that was in Christ, and who so walk as He walked. Here I continually met with what I sought for—living proofs of the power of faith, persons saved from inward as well as outward sin, by the love of God shed abroad in their hearts. I was extremely comforted and strengthened by the conversation of this lovely people."[1] It was in a Holiness revival that the Moravian missionary idea was born and realised.

[1] *John Wesley, Evangelist*, by Rev. Richard Green, p. 208.

A Holiness Revival! What was the great Evangelical Revival in England through Whitefield and Wesley, but this? They had together at Oxford been members of "The Holy Club." With their whole heart they had sought to live for God, to keep themselves separate from the world, to devote their life to the welfare of their fellow-men. They had not only sought deliverance from the guilt, but also from the power, of sin. When their eyes were opened to see how faith can claim the whole Christ in all His fulness, they found the key to that preaching which was so mightily effectual for the salvation of men.

What John Wesley did for the Methodists, General Booth, as his disciple, has done for the Salvation Army. Looking at the material on which he had to work, it is amazing how, with his teaching of the clean heart and full salvation, he has been able to inspire tens of thousands with a true devotion to Christ and to the lost. If I remember rightly, Dr. Whyte has said, that along with Spurgeon, John Wesley and General Booth are among those whom God has most honoured for winning many souls for Christ. Such a testimony has all the greater value because we know how far Dr. Whyte is from agreeing with the teaching of holiness as they think they have found it in God's Word. There may be great differences of doctrine, but no one can be blind to the seal God has set upon the

intense desire to preach a full salvation and an entire consecration.

A Revival of Holiness is what we need. Such a preaching of the claim that Christ has on us as shall lead us to live entirely for Him and His Kingdom; such an attachment of love to Him as shall make His fellowship our highest joy; such a faith in His freeing us from the dominion of sin as shall enable us in all things to obey His commandments; such a yielding to the Holy Spirit as to be led by Him in all our daily walk;—these will be some of the elements of the revival of true holiness for which the Church must learn to seek as for the Pearl of great price.

And how is it to be found? It will cost much prayer. It will cost more than that—much sacrifice of self and of the world. It will need a surrender to Christ Jesus to follow Him as closely as God is able to work it in us. We must learn to look upon religion, upon a life like Christ's, having the very same mind that was in Him, as the supreme object of daily life. It is only when a prayer such as that of M'Cheyne becomes ours, "Lord, make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be," and begins to be offered by an increasing number of ministers and believers, that the promise of the New Covenant will become a matter of experience. As the preaching of God in His holiness, of Christ as our Sanctification, of the work of the Spirit as the Spirit of holiness, takes the place that it has in God's

Word, God's people will have the power to do the work to which God has called them in making Christ known to every living creature. The promise will then be fulfilled: "The heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes."

CHAPTER XI

CHRIST'S CLAIM UPON US

In connection with the indifference to mission work that prevails, it is often said that it is owing to the fact of Christians being utterly unconscious of the claim Christ has on them. At conversion the attention was so directed to the one desire of salvation from punishment, and of grace to help them to a better life, that the thought that Christ had purchased them as a people of His own, zealous in good works, that through them He might from heaven continue and carry on the work He had begun on earth, never entered their minds. They knew that they ought to do good works in proof of their love, but never understood that these good works were service that Christ actually needed for the extension of His Kingdom, **and that their whole life, with all their powers, was to be at His disposal for that purpose.**

If there is to be any deep missionary revival it will have to begin here, that God's children who are striving to serve Him, must get a new and far deeper insight into the blessedness of this

claim of Christ, so as to be able to tell of it and testify what it is that is the moving spring of their life. From them there can then pass on a power that will rouse Christians who have hitherto lived the selfish life, to a new thought they never had before of the real blessedness of belonging to Christ. It will only be thus that the world will know that the love of God in heavenly measure and power dwells in them.

May God, by His Holy Spirit, open our eyes to see what this wonderful claim of Christ means.

What is the ground upon which it rests? That He is our God and Creator? This is but the beginning of it, and its power has been so obliterated by sin that something else was needed. And what a stupendous miracle was wrought, when the Son of God came to earth to unite Himself with us in all our sin and suffering, to bear not only the suffering as we endured it, but as God in His holiness made His judgment to rest upon it in Him. Yes, so completely did He identify Himself with us, that He stooped to bear our curse, and gave His life and His blood on our behalf. And so eternally did He make us one with Himself in His resurrection and ascension, and the glory into which He entered upon the throne of God, that through the whole universe we shall be known as His body, the inseparable companion and sharer of His place in the bosom of the Father.

One needs to give room to thoughts like these if the question is to be answered in a power that constrains the heart: What is the ground on which Christ's claim rests? Is He not worthy that every thought, and every power, shall be yielded to be His wholly and His alone?

That brings the answer to the second question, What is really Christ's claim? Nothing less than that as completely as He gave Himself for us and to us shall we give ourselves for Him and to Him. In Chapter II. of our book we had the expression — we cannot forget it, though we cannot grasp it—"The measure of the surrender of Christ for us and our salvation, is the measure of our surrender to Him and to His service." Or, as it was expressed by Professor Denney, "We must seek to persuade men that a love like Christ's can only be answered **by a love in kind,** and that for a Saviour Who came not only in water but in blood, there can be no adequate response, which is bloodless. There must be a **passion in the answer of the soul of Christ that answers** to the passion of His love to us." As we take in these words we shall feel that Christ's claim means nothing less than this, that just as He lived on earth, and now lives in heaven, in the fulness of a love to us that passeth knowledge, so nothing can now satisfy His heart, or our own, but a love that on our part seeks **to live every moment in His presence** and for His pleasure.

And just as His love showed itself in a life of intense and unceasing action, so our love must be ready to wait on His will, and to place our powers at His disposal. We shall be constantly on the lookout "to see, not how much we can manage to keep for ourselves, but what else we can find to give Him Who has given His all so unreservedly for us." There will then be no need of pleading for missionaries or for money. The only question in a company that loves Him will be the eager volunteer offer of anything that the Master may desire.

And now comes the third question, of the power thus to yield to Christ's claim and to maintain a life in unbroken surrender to it. The thought comes so easily: it may be a very beautiful ideal, but how impossible to carry it out. Listen to what Christ's answer is. **He undertakes Himself to settle all claims that He has upon us.** The love that gave itself on the Cross with the one thought of getting complete possession of us, is the love that in all its intensity and power watches over and works in us every hour of the day. When He gave Himself for us He gave Himself to us. Surely the lost sheep could count upon the shepherd with all his strength to bear it back to its home. No less can each one of us count upon the whole Christ, and that without intermission, to carry us, and to prove how entirely He is ready to keep us from sin and to work out in us all the good pleasure of His will.

If the question be asked, But why do we so little experience it? The answer is simple. We do not know it, we do not believe it, we do not yield ourselves to it. The feeble action of the Holy Spirit, hindered as He is by the spirit of the world, is the one cause of our failure. Christ calls for a passion of love to Him, corresponding to His towards us. **No power but His own love dwelling in the heart and working there, can for a moment think of giving what He claims.** He Himself, by His abiding presence, by His indwelling Spirit, by His unceasing working in us, must do all.

And this brings us to the fourth great question: How a soul, that longs to yield itself wholly to Christ's claim, can make good its claim on Christ Himself to carry out all His work in us? The answer is simple and yet beyond the power of the human mind to grasp aright. Nothing less is needed than that the Spirit shall glorify Christ in His claim on us, and our claim on Him. It is when we see how impossible it is to man to know and love Christ a right, that we shall come in our helplessness to cast ourselves at His feet and believe in the power of His Word to work a full faith in Him, and all He has done and still is to do. As we turn away from the world and from self, and consent to be crucified with Him, we shall find in the fellowship of His death, the power through which He conquers sin, and in His resurrection, the heavenly life through which He dwells in us,

becomes one with us, and works out all His blessed purpose. In law they speak of a claim in contravention. This is just what is perfectly fulfilled in the life of true love. Love cannot rest until it has possession of the heart of the beloved one by its Divine power. It draws our love to itself, and does not rest until that love has perfectly responded.

And now, this claim of Christ must be proclaimed in the Church with a new power from on high, *i.e.* by those people who have yielded themselves wholly to it, who have given their lives here at home to let Christ work in them all that He wills, and are seeking with their whole heart, even in the midst of conscious imperfection, that Christ shall have His own in the full acknowledgment of His claim in the Church around them—it is when the number of those who profess to make this their one object, begin to give themselves to prayer and supplication that Christ's claim may be acknowledged throughout the Church, that hearts will begin to be touched. Men, whether ministers or not, will begin to feel that for a Church so feeble and unspiritual and impotent to be roused for the great work of really making Christ's claim known to the heathen, nothing less is needed than the mighty power of the Spirit ruling in the hearts and lives of God's children. And every thought of the State of the Home Church, and the crying need of the heathen world, will be swallowed

up in the one thought: Christ claims the world, and Christ claims that every one who has learned to know that claim, shall yield himself so wholly to it, as to live only to make it known.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER

THE Holy Spirit is **the promise** of the Father. That includes everything. If we are to know God aright, if we are to enjoy and experience all that Christ is and has for us, if we are to enter into possession of the heritage of the true and full life which a child of God may expect even here on earth,—everything depends on our being possessed and filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Above all, if we are not only individually, but as a corporate body, to exercise the rule and dominion over our fellow-men in the power of the eternal redemption, we are absolutely dependent on that abundant measure of the Spirit which God is so willing to give. The Spirit is **the promise** of the Father. Everything that reminds us of the fallen state of the Church, of her unfaithfulness and lack of loyalty to Christ, of the terrible power that the world has over her, of her impotence to carry out her mission here on earth, is just another call: "Return ye at My reproof; **I will pour out My Spirit abundantly.**"

Let us once again listen to the great promise

that Christ gave His disciples when He was teaching them to pray. Let us see whether, in view of the ignorance that prevails as to the power of Christ's Cross, and the holiness it offers, and the contentment of Christian ministers and workers to struggle on in their human efforts to save men, without giving the Holy Spirit that first place which He must have—let us see whether our hearts will not yield to this wonderful promise, and turn to God for what He will so surely give.

Listen now to the promise of the Father. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" In these words we find four deep and unfathomable mysteries. The first, the mystery of the Holy Spirit whom God offers to give us. Next, the mystery of the Father's infinite willingness to bestow that gift. Third, the mystery of the Son of God who came from heaven to bring the promise, to open the way for its fulfilment, and then from heaven to be the channel through Whom the Father bestows it. And fourth, the mystery of prayer by which that great gift can be drawn down upon ourselves and others. If it were to please God to open our eyes fully to see the glory of these mysteries, we could not for a moment hesitate to give up everything to have the promise fulfilled in us.

1 The inconceivable mystery of the gift of the

Holy Spirit—Who is He? The Spirit of God, in Whom, just as a man has his life in the spirit that animates his body, the whole life and glory of Deity is comprehended. The Spirit is the bond of union between the Father and the Son. He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son too. And this very same Spirit is to be the Spirit of our life, dwelling in us as the hidden God, doing His work to reveal the Son and the Father within us,—the Spirit of God dwelling in us. The thought is so overwhelming that it constrains us to worship and adore.

And of this blessed Spirit God has said that He will be the life of our life. He is given with the express purpose of working out in us all that God wants us to be and to do. He is given with the understanding that we never need, in our own strength, to do what God commands: the Spirit will work it in us. He comes as the whole God to take possession of the whole man; He will be responsible for our whole being, if we will yield ourselves to Him in faith. He will glorify Christ in us, and as we look up to Christ, and through Him to the Father, the blessed Spirit will work in the depth of our hearts the likeness of God and His Christ.

2. And now the second mystery—the mystery of the Father's inconceivable willingness to bestow this infinite gift. "**How much more** shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Christ takes an illus-

tration from the deepest experience of our daily life. Have we not as children learnt to know and trust and rejoice in the willingness of a father to give us the bread we need? How natural, how easy, what joy it was, to live in that confiding assurance of what a father would do! And now just think of what that word means, "**How much more will your Father.**" Think of His greatness. Think of His holiness. Think of His love and His tender compassion, and say: Have we not reason for the most unbounded confidence; the Father is just longing to fill us with His Holy Spirit. Oh the mystery of this inconceivable longing of God to give us His Holy Spirit! Take time to take it in.

But why then, **if He is so willing**, do we so often pray and have to wait long for the answer? It is simply that we are not willing. We hinder Him, we do not yield our whole heart and soul, our whole being. We are not like the hungry child, of whom the father says he must have bread. We are not ready to sacrifice everything and only seek what the Father longs to give. Do let us believe in the mystery of this Divine willingness to give the Spirit. It will draw us to come closer to Him and under the power of His love to lay ourselves at His feet.

3. The third mystery. Who is this who brings this wonderful message? None less than the Son of God. As if to make unbelief impossible, God sends His only begotten Son as the

bearer of the good tidings. He came to prepare the way to deliver us from the power of sin, to yield His own body to the Holy Spirit as a living sacrifice on the Cross, that He might then receive the Spirit from the Father to impart to us. Sin had so separated us and our whole being from God, that it was only by death to the old nature, death to sin, that a new body could be formed in which the Holy Spirit could dwell.

And here we have the reason why, with the infinite willingness of God to bestow the Spirit, we find it so difficult to receive Him. As Christ could not receive the Spirit in His fulness of power to impart to us until He had died the death of the Cross, so it is alone in the full fellowship of that death like Him that we are made partakers of the fulness of the Spirit. It is when we are with Him crucified to the world, and in Him live as those who are dead to sin, that He can do His blessed work in us.

4. The fourth mystery—the inconceivable power of my feeble prayer to draw down the Holy Spirit from heaven, to work where and what I ask in the name of Jesus. It is not only that the Father will give me the Spirit, but He will send at my request the Spirit on other souls around me, sometimes in far-distant lands. Yes, this is what prayer has done and is doing to-day, and will do far more abundantly when God's children learn to believe the promise and to take hold of His strength.

It is high time for the Church not to look only at prayer in the light of our feebleness or our limited desires. We must begin to believe that God, in the mystery of prayer, has entrusted us with a force that can move the heavenly world and bring its power down to this earth. The prayer of one hundred and twenty at Pentecost brought down the power of the promised Spirit. When the Church continues with one accord in prayer and supplication, it will again be seen, to an extent of which we have no conception at the present time, that the Kingdom of heaven will come down in power into the hearts and lives of men.

Oh, take time, ye children of God, and fall down in adoration in view of these four great mysteries—the gift of the Holy Spirit, the infinite willingness of the Father to bestow Him, the blessed Son who is the channel, and the inconceivable power of the prayer of faith!

Let each of us for himself ask and receive. Let us believe with our whole heart, God gives, God gives every day afresh, God gives in increasing power, His blessed Spirit to every child that asks aright.

Let each of us believe in the power of prayer to bring the blessing to others, and without ceasing cry to God that His children may learn to believe in His blessed promise, and to live in the power of it.

Let us very specially, as we think of what has

been called "this Spiritless age," and the low state of spiritual life in the Church, and the terrible need of the world, yield ourselves to the work of intercession, and allow the Holy Spirit to make us of those who cry to God day and night until He pour out His blessed Spirit that there be not room to receive it. And let every prayer breathe the confident assurance, "**How much more** will your Father give the Spirit to them that ask Him."

NOTE

In *The Decisive Hour of Missions*, Dr. Mott writes: The Rev. J. Goforth bears testimony that the results of the different Evangelistic Missions were just in proportion to the extent the missionaries and Chinese Christian readers yielded themselves to God, **and sought the power of the Holy Spirit.** He expresses the conviction that "if the Church of Christ will humble itself under the hand of God, the Holy Spirit will confirm the preaching of the Word with unmistakable signs of His presence and power. I have the strongest of convictions that it would pay many, manifold, for the Church at home and abroad to cease for a season its busy round of activities and **seek for the Holy Spirit's power** as for hid treasure. If we would evangelise the world in our day we must get back to the Pentecostal factor."

Is it not incomprehensible that the Church professes to believe that the Holy Spirit is the mighty power of God, and that He will be given in answer to believing, persevering prayer, and will clothe His ministers with

power from on high, and that yet the Church does not avail itself of this great promise and does not consider much prayer for the Holy Spirit as the first and all-important thing in the work of saving men? Our faith in the Holy Spirit is to a great extent simply intellectual. Were it otherwise it would be impossible that we should not count it our greatest privilege to ask and to receive the Holy Spirit in doing God's work.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNITED FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

THE Church of Scotland. The Free Church of Scotland. The United Free Church of Scotland. What a history in these words! And this Church now brought to the bar. The bar of conscience. The bar of her own Church Courts. The bar of God.

In *Edinburgh 1910* the author commences his book by pointing out the fitness of the Conference being held in a place so rich in memories of what had happened there in connection with the Kingdom of Christ. At the close of the book he might have suggested the significance of what took place on one of the last evenings, when Dr. Denney used such strong words in regard to the United Free Church. Strange that Scotland, which has always stood during the past century for zeal for missions and for loyalty to Christ's service, should have had brought against her the terrible charge of the decrease in membership and in applicants for the ministry, as a proof of that low spiritual life which unfits her for responding

to the call for a new consecration to the service of the Kingdom.

Listen once again to the words: "I speak only of the Church to which I myself belong, but something similar I believe is true of every Church in Christendom. The United Free Church has 1700 congregations, and during the last five years the average increase in its membership has been about 850; that is to say, every second congregation has added one, and every other congregation has added none.[1] The number of candidates for the ministry is much smaller at the present time than it was a good many years ago; it was hardly a sufficient number to keep up the staff at home, to say nothing of supplying men abroad. Men are not coming forward as ministers, nor coming forward as missionaries, because they are not coming forward into the membership of the Church at all. **Something must happen to the Church at home** if it is going even to look at the work that has been put upon it by the Conference."

To judge fully of the meaning of these statements, one would require still further information. Since when has this decline in membership begun? What was the annual increase in membership

[1] In *Edinburgh 1910*, the author gives the impression of what would make things far worse. Dr. Denney is understood to have said that "the communion to which he belonged had increased its membership only by one person for every two congregations in five years."

before this decline began? Is it to be found on an average the same throughout the Church, or are there special spheres where it prevails? Are there congregations in any number where the increase is normal, bringing up the decrease in other congregations to a much higher average?

But without this information, there is food enough for thought and earnest inquiry. **Seventeen hundred ministers,** the shepherds of Christ's flock, sent by Him to seek and to save the lost, reporting that each of them has gathered in at the rate of half a member for the year's work. Some could tell of a greater increase; that only makes the case worse with the larger number who cannot tell of any souls won, but only of so many more that they have lost during the year. Just think of an Assurance Society, or a Commercial Company, counting up the clients that it has succeeded through its agents in gathering in during a year, and receiving such a report. What an urgent call there would be at once for a thoroughgoing inquiry, and a review of all the methods and men under whose charge the failure was reported.

And what can be the reason in the Church of Christ that for five years this process of decrease has been allowed to go on? In his address, Dr. Denney spoke of people who will not part with money or pleasure for the good of the Church, and then said: "I say the world is full of people like that, and what is worse, **whoever is to blame**

for it, the Church is full of them too." In every investigation in connection with a business undertaking, the great aim is to lay the blame on the guilty one. Who is to blame here? The ministry as a whole? Or the individual ministers who are responsible for the decline? Or the congregations who, by their worldliness and lack of spiritual life, hinder the ministers? Or the Church as a whole, with its Presbyteries and Synods and Assembly, because they have allowed things to come to such a pass, and not sounded the alarm in the ears of minister and people?

We have asked questions that we do not know how to answer. God only knows what the full answer means as to blame. But God is willing to give us the courage and the honesty to find out and make confession, each on his own behalf, of what share we have in this sad condition of the flock of Christ.

But apart from the question of blame, there is still the deeper question as to the spiritual significance of the situation. To what is the decline owing? Is it that the Gospel has not been faithfully preached? Is it, as some think, that the Higher Criticism is beginning to do its work? In religious matters it takes more than a generation for error to work out its evil consequences.

Or is it true that Christ is preached, that the doctrine is sound, but that it is preached with persuasive words of human wisdom, and not in demonstration of the Spirit and of power?

Or is it simply that the worldliness and selfishness, the pleasure-seeking and money-loving spirit, have so poisoned the whole atmosphere, that the Holy Spirit cannot reach through to win young hearts for Christ and His service? Can it be that there is a name to live while men are dead, and that the whole Church is suffering from that low vitality which is not deep or intense or living enough to attract men to Christ and His service?

There is still another question that leads us deeper into the real condition of things: What does God think of it? When Joshua saw Israel defeated before his enemies, he felt at once that it was a sign that God had withdrawn His presence from His people. And God confirmed his thought. "Israel hath sinned; I will no more be in the midst of you except ye put away the accursed thing from among you."

The decline in membership has this most solemn aspect—**it is a token of God's displeasure.** The promise by which the Church alone can live, of the power of His Holy Spirit and His grace working with His servants, is not fulfilled. He has turned away His face in grief and great sorrow. That is the meaning of the dearth of conversions. The Church may rejoice in what it considers all the tokens that there have been of God's favour in the past; the lack of conversions, of spiritual power, is the sure sign that He has withdrawn what is the real proof of His presence—**His saving power in the con-**

version of sinners. God, Who answered Joshua when he fell on his face at the loss of God's presence, will come near to us as we wait for Him, and reveal what the cause is of our discomfiture.

And now the last and the crucial question, What is to be done? These five years have been allowed to pass on without any definite, full, and final dealing with the question. God waits to hear what we have to say, and what we propose doing to put away from us the evil, before there can be any hope of our restoration to the position of a Church in which He can dwell and work mightily for the honour of His name.

Ten years ago what enthusiasm there was in the union of the two Churches. What high expectations were entertained of the increase of power through the union for carrying on God's work. And here God comes and reveals to us how little that power has been sanctified and used by the Holy Spirit, and how possible it is that a union in which men's hearts were stirred with great joy, may be lacking in that one thing which Christ longs for, and the angels rejoice in, the salvation of souls.

Let us turn to God, each one for himself. Let us ask Him to give the spiritual insight into the true state of things we so much need, the spirit of penitence which has been so lacking, and the spirit of faith, a strong and living faith, that takes hold of Him and will not let Him go until He bless us.

NOTE

"How can we impress the imagination of the Church as a whole? The rank and file of the Christian Church will never grasp the truth that the evangelisation of the world is the primary task, the central duty of the Church, until a more definite lead in a more definite manner is given by those in a position of leadership in the Church. How can they give that lead? First, they must be possessed of the truth themselves; they must be obviously full of it. They must be **absolutely enthusiastic and in deadly earnest themselves.** Secondly, they must afford opportunities to their people for intercession and praise for foreign missions. How much regular intercession and praise for foreign missions is there in the regular worship of our Churches? Thirdly, it surely should, if it is the greatest task, **dominate the assemblies and gatherings of the leaders of the Church whenever they come together** to consider the things of the Kingdom of God. There are other matters of importance, but not so important. First things first, when we are gathered together." (Rev. C. Bardsley, Assembly Hall.)

CHAPTER XIV

CONTRITION. CONFESSION. CONSECRATION

I TAKE this title from an article in a missionary magazine, with an account of the powerful working of God's Spirit in a revival. Christians of long standing were by the Holy Spirit brought into true brokenness of heart and penitence on account of sins in their Christian life. When the contrition had fully mastered them, they confessed both before God and man what they had done. The faith that this confession was accepted gave courage for a new consecration of mingled joy and trembling.

We speak of the blessing by which missions will react upon the Church. Does not such a story teach us a lesson that where God's children are brought face to face with a great evil that has been allowed in the Church, His Holy Spirit will, in answer to prayer, work that same **deep contrition**, and that penitent confession, without which there can be no hope of restoration to full pardon or to true consecration? The condition in which the Church finds herself placed by the twofold charge, the neglect of her own members

and the neglect of the heathen entrusted to her, does indeed call for deepest contrition. There must have somewhere been a lack of watchfulness and prayer. There must have been a lack of spiritual life and power in the congregations concerned. There must have been on the part of ministers—they will be the first to acknowledge it—a lack of that devotion and faith and prayer, which would have met the evil ere it had attained such proportions.

The great thought that we must take in is the dishonour and the grief caused to God by the lapse of the lost ones, by the reproach resting on the Church of His beloved Son, and by the terrible thwarting of His so strong desire through the Church to bless the world. A spiritual truth like this cannot be grasped by the natural mind. It is by God's Spirit alone that it can get full possession of our hearts. What is more, it takes time with God alone, for Him to breathe and then to deepen the spirit of contrition. It takes time to turn away from the world and its numberless interests, and to wait on God to bow and to bend the heart. Contrition must become such a reality that we feel something of the pain of a broken heart, and that we offer this sacrifice to God as a felt, living reality. Where such contrition has been wrought by the Spirit, He Whose name is holy will come to dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble heart.

Such contrition must first be found in secret, at

least by some who mourn before God their own state and the state of the Church around them. But then it will desire to help others. The Church is a living Body; every member cares for the other and suffers with it. The contrite one will find like-minded men to cultivate and strengthen this spirit of penitential humiliation. And by the grace of God the gracious influence may be spread, and ministers will be found to give fit expression to what God claims and to what He promises.

Let us with our whole heart ask that God may give to all who seek it the spirit of true, deep, abiding contrition. As we think of all the sins that are implied in this decrease of membership, we shall feel the need of the conviction of the Holy Spirit to bring us into the true posture before God. There is the sin of blood-guiltiness, of unfaithfulness in the discharge of our duty, of unbelief in not having trusted God for His grace, of remissness in prayer and fellowship with God; all calling for deep humiliation.

Then comes CONFESSION. There is, alas! a religion in which the confession of sin is easy, because men think that it is a matter of course that we must sin, and they are sure that, if we only confess, God is ready to pardon. This is not the confession God's Word speaks of. "Whoso confesseth **and forsaketh** his transgressions, shall obtain mercy." That alone is the repentance that needeth not to be repented

of. "True repentance has restoring power; it never leaves you in the place in which you were." Confession and forsaking the sin make up true contrition, and this is why it is so hard for an honest man to confess his sin. He feels that God expects him to confess and forsake. But where contrition has been deep and true, there the Christian will feel it impossible for him to confess without forsaking. Sin, whatever it be, is something very awful and God-dishonouring. It is not a simple or an easy thing to confess it in truth. It means a transaction with God in which the sin is brought out, and dealt with, and given up to God in the faith that He is righteous to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. Again I say, nothing but the deep contrition which the Holy Spirit works can fit us for true and full confession and forsaking.

When once this has been done in secret before God, then comes the time to do it before man too. The order may sometimes be reversed. Under the movings of the Holy Spirit in a company, the confession of one or more may help to rouse others to follow in his steps. But there is always a danger in this of superficiality. The only safety is that men must be led from the public confession to the inner chamber, and not to rest until they know that God has met them and accepted from them the sacrifice of a broken heart. Everything depends upon knowing that there has been a definite transaction between God and the soul.

It is this that will give its value to public confession, and help to stir and strengthen others to follow in the same path.

Above all, this is what will give confidence for a full and entire consecration. In the letter to the Churches from the World Missionary Conference, the words occur: "God is demanding of us all a new order of life, of a more arduous and self-sacrificing nature than the old." It calls upon us "to face the new task with a new consecration." Where the contrition and confession that we have spoken of has been full and true, a full and a true consecration becomes possible, or rather, becomes a necessity to the penitent heart.

There are various ways of putting the terms of consecration. Keswick has one; Dr. Mott has another; Scotland has its own. Our godly fathers in the deep fear and reverence of God knew what it was to give themselves up to His will, and to live lives of holy fellowship with Him and devoted service.

There are thousands of Christians who would long to be helped to such a life, but they cannot understand how it is to be. May God raise up men in the pulpit and in the pew who can testify to their brethren what the strength is in which Christ can keep the soul that trusts Him, and enable it to walk in His presence all the day!

Do let us get hold of the thought that if the Church is to be lifted up out of her feebleness into the abundant life of Christ it can only be

by ministers and people taking a new stand of separation from sin and the world, yielding themselves in a fuller surrender than ever before to follow Christ and live alone for Him. A revival among God's children cannot be thought of unless the average standard of religion with which we have been content, make way, in the power of faith and the Holy Spirit, for a much more tender walk with Christ, and a much more complete yielding of our whole being upon the altar of sacrifice.

Can it be that God is going to do this? Can it be that, out of the shame and confusion of face with which many of the 1700 ministers have looked at the result of their work, and many of the members of the Church have confessed their share in that low vitality and feeble spirituality which had so much to do with it, God will bring such wonderful blessing? It is certain—He is most willing to work the contrition, to accept the confession, and to strengthen for the consecration.

And will He do it? That rests with us. The thought is unspeakably solemn. But so it is. He waits, He longs. He is working to draw His children to Himself. Oh, do not let us hesitate to bow before Him and listen to His voice: "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you; be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel."

Let us not wait for others to begin. If there

has been any touch of God's Spirit as you have read and thought about the present crisis, if there has been any moving of desire to pray for the mighty power of the Holy Spirit to breathe on the Church,—begin at once. Plead with God for His almighty grace, and take no rest until you know that as a contrite penitent **your consecration has been accepted and sealed.** Go out then as a living witness to help and bring Christ's call to repentance to the ears of His people, and to lead all who will listen to the place of decision and full consecration.

CHAPTER XV

REPENT!

In the Epistles to the seven Churches of Asia Minor, we have a series of sunlight pictures of the state of a minister and his people. They have been done by Him Whose eyes are as a flame of fire, searching out and showing forth the actual state of those to whom He speaks. Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword: what He sees and shows, He clothes in words of such Divine power that they can touch the heart, and after all these centuries can meet the needs of the Churches of our day, and work in us all that He teaches and commands.

What a solemn thought, that after Christ had finished His teaching on earth, and left the further instruction of His disciples to the Apostles, He should, after having kept silence for more than half a century, have again felt desirous of giving some last words to the Church on earth. We have these in Rev. ii. and iii. In them He tells us what the smaller portion of the Church can be, and is, so as to please Him. And He tells of what the great majority is, and ought not

to be, and what the teaching is with which His ministers ought to plead with them to return to Him as their Lord.

One of the central words in these Epistles is the word "REPENT." There are two of the Epistles, to Smyrna and Philadelphia, in which they do not occur. Of these two Churches the Lord had nothing but good to say. To Smyrna: "I know thy tribulation and thy poverty, **but thou art rich, Fear not!**" To Philadelphia: "Thou hast a little power, thou didst keep My word, and didst not deny My name. Because thou didst keep the word of My patience, **I will also keep thee.**" God be praised that there are Churches and circles on earth of which the majority are such as to satisfy the heart of the Son of God!

Then we have the Epistle to Thyatira, in which the word "REPENT" occurs, although not as an address to the angel of the Church. There was much to be praised: "I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first." But there was one evil: the woman Jezebel was allowed to teach. He had given her time to repent, and she repented not.

And then come four Churches in which the word "REPENT" is used in the singular, as addressed to the minister as well as the people. To Ephesus, after mentioning eight things in which they had proved their discipleship, He

says: "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." In all the highest relationships of life, love is everything; between a mother and a child, a husband and a wife, a king and his people, love is the chief thing. And so with Christ too. There may be diligence in His service, there may be zeal for the honour of His name, there may be patient endurance of suffering for Him, and yet Christ's heart can be satisfied with nothing less than the first love, the constraining love which delights in His fellowship, yielding itself wholly to His personal influence, and giving a living testimony to Himself. Amid all her activities the true tender love to Christ was wanting. It is of this that Christ says: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and **repent,** and do the first works."

As we think of the failure of the Church of our day in regard to making Christ known, and her utter unfitness for taking up the work to which she is now being led, do we not here find the secret cause of it all, the lack of personal love to Christ? And does not the word of the Lord come to us too, "REPENT, or else I come to thee, and remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou **repent**"?

To Pergamos: "I have a few things against thee." Their sin was: they tolerated false teachers. "REPENT therefore."

It is often said that the Higher Criticism and its advanced teaching has much to do with the

loss of power in the preaching and the lack of an earnest Christian life among the people. In Chapter IV. of this book we quoted a writer who said: "In many of our churches the great underlying doctrines and facts of the Gospel are scarcely ever referred to in preaching; the note of personal appeal to the conscience and direct effort for conversion is seldom heard."

And one has had more than one public testimony in regard to the lack of the full and fearless preaching of Christ and His Cross. And even those who are sound themselves are only too ready to be silent in regard to a preaching of which they know that it cannot satisfy the need or exercise Divine power to salvation. Christ's REPENT is a summons to see whether our teaching is truly the proclamation of the message of God's inspired Word, or seeks to please men by its excellency of speech and persuasive words of human wisdom.

To Sardis: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead, for I have found no works of thine fulfilled before My God. Remember how thou hast received, and REPENT." In the address of Dr. Denney from which we have already quoted, he spoke of many people who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, and who refuse to give up anything for Christ's sake, and then added: "I say the world is full of people like that, and what is worse, whoever is to blame for it, the Church is

full of them too; and as far as these people are concerned, the Christian religion is dead." What an awful description,—a Church full of such men! And it is of this condition that Christ says: "Thou hast a name to live, and thou art dead." It is to such a Church that Christ's first word is—REPENT.

To Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. Thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art the wretched one, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Have we not here a true picture of a great many of our Churches and our Christians—neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, with a form of godliness, without the power, seeking and succeeding to their own minds, to unite the friendship of God with the friendship of the world? And as the result of this, the spirit of self-satisfaction and mutual self-gratulation is everywhere heard, with its deep undertone, "We are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." And Christ comes solemnly: "And thou knowest not that thou art the wretched one."

How does Christ meet these lukewarm self-satisfied Christians? He has again just that same solemn word, REPENT. Whatever the evil is, there is but one gate out of it—that hard, stern, but blessed word, REPENT. Just think for a moment of the four Churches that have been mentioned.

In Ephesus it was a lack of LOVE,—the constraining love of Christ was no longer found.

In Pergamos it was a lack of TRUTH,—they had forsaken the inspired Word, they tolerated the teaching of error.

In Sardis it was a lack of LIFE,—they had a name to live, but were dead.

In Laodicea it was a lack of FIRE,—the baptism of the Spirit and of fire was no longer known.

Whatever the state of a Church may be, however closely minister and people may be bound together, Christ in heaven has one message: REPENT.

Think of what that means from Him Who gave His life to win the hearts for Himself. He is now seated on the throne to give repentance. He pleads by His cross and blood, and seeks to touch the heart and break it with that love of His. With a voice of infinite holiness and tenderest compassion, He pleads with those whom His heart-searching words have warned and roused—just that one word: "REPENT."

That is the word which He commissions the angels of the Churches to sound in the ears of His people, to bring nigh and to open up to them, and to plead with them till they bow before it: "REPENT."

He had spoken the word first of all to the Angel of the Church himself, and whether he had been found wanting in Love to Christ, or in the

Truth of Christ, or in the Life of Christ, or in the Fire of Christ, He had called him to come and as a penitent to receive His pardon and the new experience of His blessing and power. He then sends him forth with his whole heart to sound out the note of warning and of welcome: "REPENT, O my people, repent."

We are accustomed to use the word "Repent" in our evangelistic missions or in our ordinary conversion preaching. The 1700 ministers to whom Christ has committed the charge of a whole Church, in which the decline of membership proves what a lack of power there was in the preaching and in the spiritual life, are here called to take up this word, "REPENT," in its deeper meaning.

The Church has been on the down-grade. In Ephesus the defection began amid great zeal for the truth, with the loss of the first love. In Pergamos comes a step lower: God's Holy Word is no longer taken as the only standard of teaching. In Sardis the evil becomes still more manifest: with a name to live, they are dead. In Laodicea it reaches its full growth: men are so utterly unconscious of anything wrong, so satisfied with themselves and with each other, so blind to what Christ calls their wretchedness and nakedness, that they proudly boast in their meetings and reports: "Rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing."

What a work for the angels of the Churches to

take that word "REPENT" on their knees from Christ's own lips, to bow to it with their whole heart, and then in the power of His Spirit to carry it throughout the Church as the one great means of revival and restoration!

Let no one think that this message is too hard who can bear it. Listen to what Christ says of it: "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten; be zealous therefore and REPENT. Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in." Be not afraid, O man of God, to sound the word "REPENT" loud and clear; it is Christ's infinite love that speaks the word, that will give the blessing with it, that will reveal Himself to His penitent people. Out of the fulness of a living faith in the love of Christ, call men to repent in the assurance of His welcome and His blessing.

Christ closes each of these seven Epistles with the word, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches." Let the minister of Christ take that word into the depth of his heart; let him pray and believe till he is sure the blessed Spirit is speaking through him; let him tell the Church that the power of the Spirit is working to reveal Christ and His love; and let him henceforth carry on His work as never before, in the assurance that, in answer to much prayer, the mighty power of the Spirit will secretly work, will restore God's children in the

path of repentance to a new and more abundant life. There will then be no longer reason to complain of the decline in membership, or of lack of loyalty to Christ and the service of His Kingdom.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

THE question is often asked as to what it is that in Keswick and other Conferences so influences men, and brings a power to bear on them which in the ordinary services of the same speaker is not felt. The answer is to be found in the fact that men are invited to come to the meetings with a definite need, and are helped towards a definite step for the fulfilment of that need. Is not this the great secret of the success of our evangelists? They occupy men intensely and continuously with the thought of their need of salvation, and the possibility of their obtaining it at once. And just so in Conferences on the spiritual life; men who feel burdened by the thought of their continual sinning, and their impotence in seeking for victory, are invited to come and hear how deliverance can be obtained. It is the tone of confident decision in the speaker in regard to what he holds out that is the key to the influence he exerts in helping men to take the decision as to what they are to do and to be.

There are other spheres in which the same

secret of success in preaching the Gospel will be found. It is specially seen in the Students' Christian Association. All who have heard Dr. Mott, or some of the other leaders in the work, know how, while the phraseology is different from Keswick, the essential feature is the same emphasis placed on immediate decision. When Dr. Mott, years ago, did such a remarkable work among the students of Edinburgh, it was felt, that in his whole appeal to the will, they were made to feel the contagious influence of a power that gave them courage to hope for deliverance. It was not a teaching that made an impression, which men were to carry home and think about—that may have been the case with some—but with far the larger number the help was found in the positive note of confidence in a present and immediate change.

It was the same note that breathed in all his work among Christian students. As he pleaded for the irrevocable surrender to the vow of spending at least half an hour every morning with God, it meant to many the giving up of habits of sloth and self-indulgence, and thereby the consecration of the whole day to the service of God. It was on this account that he so often used the expression both in speaking and in writing: "Next to the act of conversion, in which a man turns from sin to God, and after that, of the reception of the Holy Ghost, as the power of a new life, I know of nothing that will aid a man so much in

the Christian life as the undiscouragable resolution to spend at least half an hour in the morning alone with God." The apparently simple act of the will in taking the decision meant nothing less than the full surrender to live for God and His will.

It was that same call for decision that appealed so mightily to bring men out as volunteers for the Foreign Mission field. After the command of Christ to preach the Gospel to every creature, as resting upon every disciple, had been enforced with all the urgency of a man who himself had yielded his whole being to His service, an appeal was made to all who were really willing to show their full allegiance to Christ, to say whether there was any reason for their not at once accepting His call. In the Life of Douglas Thornton, we read how he and a friend after a meeting went out into a field under the open heavens in perfect agony about this burden that was being laid upon them, and how they did not rest until they had the courage to make a full surrender.

In the same book we get a glimpse of the intensity with which men like Thornton, at the Liverpool Conference, threw themselves into the work of prayer and of influencing others. Under the deep conviction that they had actually given themselves to Christ, to receive in prayer His guidance and power, they proved what it meant to live wholly for the Kingdom. Dr. Mott has said that the book that has influenced him most

in his life is John Foster's *Decision of Character*. The word is characteristic of his whole work and of that of his fellow-workers in the great Volunteer Movement.

Mr. George Sherwood Eddy, a missionary and delegate to the World Missionary Conference, gave some six months before the Conference, in a meeting, his witness as to what had been the secret of his power. "I remember fifteen years ago, before going out to India, sitting down with my room-mate, now in China, and saying to him: 'What are we going to tell them out there on the field? What message have we got for men? Are we merely going to tell them about Christ? If so, it would be cheaper to send out Bibles and tracts. Can we tell them that we know Jesus Christ saves and satisfies, that He keeps us more than conquerors day by day?' I said, 'I am not satisfied. I do not feel that I have a message such as I need for men out there, nor the experience, nor the power. If we have not, is not the one great thing we need before we leave this country—to know Him?' From that day to the end of our student days we rose every morning at five o'clock. From five to six we had an unhurried hour for the Word of God, and from six to seven an unhurried hour for prayer. These two hours each day changed our lives, and we were unspeakably blessed." That valley of decision was to them truly the valley of blessing. And God has set His seal to it in the fruit of Mr. Eddy's work.

It is this note that is too often working in our evangelical preaching. It is this note that will be greatly needed if slumbering or feeble but well-meaning Christians are truly to be roused. People are content when they hear what they think a profitable discourse. They carry away the impression, and hope that some way or other, effect will be produced. And still they go on in that half-hearted religion, to which they confess but from which they cannot find the power to escape. If God's Spirit begins truly to move in the Church, the preaching will need a tone of decision hitherto but little known. The hearer must feel that he is called to face a crisis. He is to say whether he is really going to yield to Christ's claim, and to surrender his heart and life to His service. By the grace of God the minister must seek to get hold of him and not to let him go until the decision is taken.

And why have I written all this? It is because I feel deeply that unless there sound throughout the Church the call to an immediate repentance on the part of believers, and there is held out to them the hope of a possible, of a sure restoration to a life devoted to Jesus Christ, there is no prospect of anything like a true response to the plea of the Conference in Edinburgh and the claim of our Lord in heaven. The sentences that were uttered in regard to the impotence of the Church, and the disloyalty of Christians to their

Saviour, ring in my ears (see Chapter II.). How I wish that every thoughtful, prayerful friend of missions could take up these sentences and give himself away to take in their full meaning. Surely the question would then come with tremendous urgency, "Can anything be done to bring Christians to a sense of their shame, and to the desire for the restoration of that spirit of loyalty and self-devotion without which Christianity is but a form?"

If we are to look to the ministers to lead people to a conviction of what is wrong in their state, to a desire for what is better, to a faith in the possibility of an entire change in all who are willing for it, we must have men in whom the Spirit of God works such a faith in the power of Christ as shall enable them to inspire their hearers with an entirely new hope.

And where are these men to be found? In the 1700 congregations of the Free Church of Scotland, of which mention was made, there surely must be not a few in whose heart the passion of Jesus Christ for those for whom He died burns like a fire. But many are not conscious of what power God can exert through them. If they truly know the power of Jesus Christ to keep them loyal and true, they have a message that will assuredly reach some hearts. Let loyalty to Christ, full, unflinching, whole-hearted loyalty, become the keynote of their praying and their

preaching. Let a few band themselves together to ask God for this one thing—the full insight into the terrible condition of a Church in which so few members are won to Christ by the preaching of the Word. Let them offer themselves to God for a new baptism of His Spirit, and a new power to preach the day of the Lord and His presence in the midst of His people. Let them not rest until they begin to gather together, however few they be, the souls who are willing to be the living witnesses, that Jesus Christ does indeed save from the power of selfishness and the world. He does indeed enable men and women in the ordinary walk of life to live with His life so in their heart that the conquest of the world for Him shall be the greatest reality, the all-absorbing object of their life and their love.

Teachers of psychology and ethics tell us that to break the power of an old habit, or to cultivate an entirely new one, the first step is that the initiative should be taken with full purpose of heart, and that everything should be done, by pledge or public confession, at once to break away from the old, and to commit one's self with no room for compromise. They tell teachers that the application of this principle will give in many cases the needed help to those who otherwise look upon deliverance with despair. It is just this that the preacher needs who comes to call feeble backward Christians to a new life of loyalty

and devotion. If they can be brought to confess the wrong of their position, and their impotence to put it right, to believe that Christ by His Spirit can strengthen them to escape from the bondage in which they have been serving self, and the world, they will find the courage for taking the decisive step. The faith that Christ is able to keep them in that close relationship with Himself which makes a life of consecration possible and most blessed, will enable them to step out into the full surrender of themselves to His mighty power; and the Church will see what wonders God can do in those who wait on Him. Let us but have witnesses, in the pulpit or out of it, in whom the power of a living testimony sounds the notes of victory, and we shall find that God is faithful to give revival where hitherto all had been hopeless.

It is in the valley of decision that such preachers and such witnesses are found. It is in the valley of decision, that is, the valley of judgment, where a man feels himself utterly condemned and yet takes courage to believe in what Christ can make of him, that the Church will find the secret of her lost power, and the courage for that surrender to Christ and His service which seeks to know of no other measure than that of the love in which He gave Himself for us.

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." Such is the prayer many will offer.

But do let us understand that we may not wait till that happens. Let each one who hears the call of God go down, even if it be all alone, into the Valley of Decision, and yield himself a willing sacrifice into His hands.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MINISTRY

I FEEL that I have come to the most important and the most difficult chapter of my book. It was a real disappointment to me to find that the Conference had separated without a special appeal to the ministers. I cannot but think that it would have carried great weight, and roused much thought and prayer. Under a deep sense of my insufficiency for the task of speaking to my brethren, I will try to give expression to what the message is that the subject of this book brings to the minister.

The first thought is, the heavy responsibility that rests upon the minister. All that we have heard of the failure of the Church, and of the low state of the spiritual life which is the cause of that failure, is first of all an appeal to the ministry. It comes with the question, Why it is that things are so, and what is to be done to remedy it? In the Report the responsibility is laid upon the ministry. Listen to some of its sentences.

"As far as the interest of the Church in

missions is concerned, the minister holds the key to the situation." "In the work of the home ministry is found the secret of the real condition existing in the Church." "Invariably a missionary pastor makes a missionary church." "We cannot but regard this phase of our subject as one of the most important, if not the most important, entrusted to this Commission to investigate. There is no doubt that in order to arouse the Church to a sense of its opportunity and privilege the clergy must be reached, and their enthusiastic co-operation secured." "On ministers, more than on all others, devolves the duty of educating the Church to its missionary calling, and supplying to the people the enthusiasm which will make the Church equal in spiritual power to the present world situation."

Are we prepared to admit and accept this tremendous responsibility? To confess our share in the Church's failure and to yield ourselves, by the grace of God, at every sacrifice, to fulfil our task?

In answer to the question, How is it possible that the majority of ministers should never have realised what their duty is, or, when it was put before them, had not the power and the courage to fulfil it? the Report reminds us of the share which the Church as a whole has in the blame. She has never, through her Theological Colleges, trained her young students to an insight into this part of their high calling. She has tried to encourage the ministers and the members who

are interested in the work, to exercise all their influence, but has never spoken out, clear and strong, the truth that every minister and every member is to live and labour that Christ may be made known to every living creature, and so trained her ministers accordingly.

But this extenuation does not relieve us from the responsibility that God has put upon us, and which He would have taught us, had we known what it is to live in the continual prayer for His teaching. But here comes another great defect of our theological training—how little we were taught that in the true ministry prayer is the first and essential thing. It was not that our Professors did not sometimes remind us of the need of prayer. But it was taken for granted that we knew how to pray, and did pray. Not long ago I was told of two brethren who were talking on the subject, mourning that in their student time they had not been taught to acquire the secret of prayer, when one said: "It is not that the subject was not mentioned, but it was not impressed upon us that prayer is the first secret of success in the ministry." The student life is naturally carried forward into the ministry, and we find it, oh, so hard, to acquire the habit of truly effectual prayer, amidst all the study and work that occupies our time.

And yet, it is just in this matter of prayer that the responsibility lies upon us so heavily. The Conference Report tells us, time after time,

that if we are to take our part, and to train our people in yielding themselves to Christ's claim, we must above all learn to pray. "How to multiply the number of Christians who, with clear, unshakable faith in the character of God, will wield this force of intercession—that is **the supreme question of Foreign Missions.** Every other consideration is **secondary to that of wielding the forces of prayer.**" "The primary need is not the multiplication of prayer meetings, but that individual Christians should learn to pray. Every endeavour must be made to propagate the spirit and habit of prayer among all Christian workers."

What a responsibility resting on the minister in the matter of his own intercession, and in his training of His people to take part in it!

I have spoken of the lack in our training, as theological students, of the enthusiasm for missions, and the power of intercession. I feel as if I must mention something that goes still deeper. We have more than once heard in this book that the Conference traces the lack of interest in missions and of devotion in prayer, to the feeble vitality, to the low spiritual life prevailing in the Church. And it is just this that many a minister never learns at College, that the power to pray, and the power to teach others to pray, is entirely dependent on the depth of the spiritual life. Did not our Lord Jesus say, "If ye abide in Me, and My words

abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you"? Many a man has resolved to pray more, and has failed, because he did not know this secret, **that the average Christian life is not sufficient to give power with God in prayer.** It needs self-denial, a turning away from the world, and the sacrifice of what may appear legitimate to others,—it needs a heart given up to God, and longing to be led by the Holy Spirit, if we are to claim all the wonderful promises in God's Word connected with prayer.

Listen once again to a passage from the Report: "The superhuman must be emphasised as never before since the days of the Early Church. Christians need a fuller, more constant, and more commanding realisation of the personal presence of Christ." That means there must be the experience of a closer daily fellowship with Him than is ordinarily thought possible. "Conferences have been held, at which the work of world evangelisation has received careful consideration, but **there has been alarming neglect to face the great central problem,** namely, how to translate into actual experience the Word of Christ, 'He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit, for apart from Me ye can do nothing.'" "The missionary problem of to-day is not primarily a financial problem, but it is how to ensure a vitality equal to the imperial expansion of the missionary programme.

The only hope of this is for Christians to avail themselves of the more abundant life through Christ." Everything returns to the question asked at the commencement of the Report on the Home Base: "Has the Church sufficient vitality for the tremendous task to which it is called?" That sufficient vitality is what the ministers first of all need, if they are to lead the Church to it. On the ministers rests the responsibility of lifting the Church up out of her feeble vitality into the abundant life that there is in Christ Jesus.

What a responsibility! "Who is sufficient for these things?" "Our sufficiency is of God, Who also hath made us sufficient as ministers of the Spirit." **God never lays responsibility on His servant without the assurance of sufficient grace for all that He expects him to be.** Let this thought turn the sense of responsibility into prayer. And let all that the Conference has taught us about the absolute necessity and the limitless possibilities of prayer, just lead us to cast ourselves upon God in the confidence that He will fit us for the place that we are being called upon to take in the world conquest.

You remember the instance I gave in Chapter XVI., "The Valley of Decision," of the decision of two young students to give an hour each day to prayer. What think you? Would it be too much for you to ask God for grace to spend half an hour, every day, in addition to

your ordinary time, just to learn from Him the art of prayer and intercession, and in that school to get the needful training for that power of prayer which will lead you into the abundant life of Christ as never before? That will fit you for the great work of lifting up the Church into the same place of power and blessing. In the faith of God's promise I pray you, be not afraid, but go down into the Valley of Decision. Let it be your firm resolve to spend that half-hour with God in special prayer for your own need and the need of His Church in connection with the new consecration to the service of His Kingdom to which we are called. By the grace of God the decision for that half-hour may be a decision for a life of new devotion to God and His will. The hesitation and self-reproach for unfaithfulness in the morning brings, unconsciously, a cloud all the day. The decision, at any cost, to do God's will in the morning hour, casts us upon Christ, and makes the will strong for all the day. And the decision for the day may give courage for the next day, and lead us on to a walk with God day by day.

What a responsibility resting upon the ministers in this question of the feeble spiritual life in the Church, and in the prayer to God to lift her out of her low estate into the sunlight of His love.

CHAPTER XVIII

A PLEA FOR MORE PRAYER

WHAT a difference between the first mountain springs where a great river has its rise, and the vast expanse of water where it reaches the sea and carries fleets on its bosom. Such, and even much greater, is the difference between prayer in the simplicity of its first beginnings, and the incomprehensible mystery of what it becomes when it makes man a partner with God in the rule of the world. Instead of its being the simple channel through which a child or a newly converted heathen obtains his request from God, it becomes the heavenly power that can dispose of all the riches of God and bring down the blessings of the Spirit on countless souls.

What a study prayer is! I know not whether to thank God most for prayer in its blessed simplicity, as it is the comfort of those who hardly ever go beyond their personal needs, or in the profound depths in which it reveals to us how close and wonderful the union is between God and man.

I feel as if I cannot end this book without once again attempting to point the reader to this

latter aspect of it. I do so with fear and trembling; the thoughts are so wonderful and beyond our reach that one hardly ventures to hope that he can make them plain. And yet with God's help we must make the attempt.

When God undertook the stupendous work of creating man in His own image and after His likeness, His great object was to have a being in whom He could perfectly reveal all the glory of His Divine power. Man was to be here on earth what God is in heaven, the king and ruler. He was made in the image of God in this specially, that just as God is self-determined, and is what He is by His own blessed will, so man also, as far as a creature dependent on God could become so, was to have the fashioning of his own character and being, and so fitting himself for the power of ruling others. As we have it in the New Testament, we are made kings and priests unto God. As priests we turn our face Godward to worship and receive His blessing. As kings, we turn manward to dispense that blessing in ruling and guiding them.

The great thought of God was thus to train man for the place that he is to have with Christ upon the throne. God's purpose was that man should so rule that God would do nothing but through him, and that man should understand that he would do nothing but through God. It is in this wonderful relationship that prayer has its mystery and its glory. God promises to

dispense His Spirit and to exercise His power according to the wish of man. If man will avail himself of his high prerogative, and fully yield himself to the Holy Spirit's teaching in regard to the will of God, God will make literally true, what Christ promised, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, YE SHALL ASK WHAT YE WILL AND IT SHALL BE DONE UNTO YOU." The prayer of faith will remove mountains.

We are told that in Nature every spirit seeks to clothe itself in a suitable body. The life in a tree creates for itself in the fruit the embodiment of its inmost nature. And so with God, Who is Spirit. The creation of man was not an afterthought but part of His eternal purpose to reveal Himself completely throughout all creation. The first step in that path was the creation of man out of the dust, in His image and likeness. The next was the coming of the Eternal Son to unite and forever to identify Himself with human nature. Then followed the resurrection from the dead, and ascension to heaven of Christ in His glorified humanity. And last of all came the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by which the Church became His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. In that body Christ is to be revealed when He comes in glory, and in that body the Father will dwell in the Son. Through all eternity man is to be the revelation of what God is, and through man Christ will rule the world.

And it is in prayer that even now man takes

his part in the rule of the world. As a preparation for his future glory he even now, in the holy priesthood of intercession, begins to understand what the inconceivable power of prayer can be, because it is the highest proof of the image of God in which we have been created, and of the exercise of our kinglike privilege of ruling the world.

The point at which it becomes difficult for us to believe all this is when we are told that God is longing to pour out blessing, but is prevented by His people. They are the hindrance in the way. God allows His work to suffer loss, terrible loss, because He will not break the law He Himself made. He respects the liberty He Himself gave man; in infinite long-suffering He bides His time till man becomes willing to pray and receive His blessing. In Vol. VI. the Report says, "We must make men understand that it is **only their lack of faith and half-hearted consecration that hinders** the rapid advance of the work, **only their own coldness that keeps back** His redemption from a lost world. We must ever bear in mind that He is eager and able to save the world already redeemed by Him, **if only we, His professed followers** on earth, **were willing that He should.**"

One would think that men on hearing this would say: It is impossible; it cannot be true that millions are perishing, because God's people are not praying. But it is true. But a truth which the natural mind cannot grasp. It is only

the Holy Spirit that can enlighten the heart to apprehend the spiritual reality of this wonderful partnership into which God has taken up His people in the salvation of the world. One would say, How can the Church be so infatuated as to spend all her strength in doing a work that is comparatively a failure, that ends in a decline of membership, when she has the Divine promise that in answer to prayer the power of the Holy Spirit can make the dry bones to live? There is no explanation but this: People hear it with the hearing of the ear, but the truth has no power over them, simply because they do not yield themselves, in holy fellowship with God, to receive the Spirit and the Spirit-born conviction that prayer can bring down into the heart the life that there is in Christ Jesus.

How often the complaint is heard that it is so hard to pray aright, to pray enough, to pray in power. The reason is simple. We think very much of prayer as a means of getting blessing for ourselves. We enter so little into the thought of yielding ourselves entirely to the holy fellowship with God, and the self-denying sacrifice needed in bearing the needs of our fellow-men. We are so little conscious of our being kings; no wonder that the confidence of our priestly access to God for the work of bringing down blessing on the world, is but feeble. A man's thought rules his actions; the ideas he fosters make his character. Oh that God's children might take hold of the

wonderful promises that whatsoever they ask in the name of Jesus it shall be done unto them, and learn to look upon themselves as God's chosen intercessors, the channels without whom His love cannot do its work. They may be sure that prayer will begin to have a new attraction, and fellowship with God will become their highest privilege.

I fear of wearying my reader by the repetition of the chief thoughts that occupy us in this book as a plea for more prayer. And yet I will risk once again summing up what it is that I think God wants us to consider.

The verdict of the World Missionary Conference that the Church is unwilling and unfit for doing the work God puts before her.

The confession of the Churches that they are impotent to keep hold of their members; the world spirit is too strong.

The sad truth that both these things are owing to a lack of that spiritual life and power without which our work must be in vain.

The conviction that nothing but the power of God's Holy Spirit in our heart and life can cure the evil.

The faith that God longs with all His heart to give His Spirit to the fervent prayer of the righteous man that availeth much, and so to lift His Church to the life that there is for her in Christ Jesus.

As we study and pray over these thoughts,

step by step, in God's presence, the mystery of prayer will open out to us. We shall see that God has actually made us "partners in the business," made us kings and priests to dispense His blessings to a feeble Church and a perishing world. We shall hear a call to forsake that half-hearted, selfish, prayerless life in which we have lived, and to begin as intercessors to take our place before God, in the assurance that He has put the quickening of the Church in our hands, and will give to persevering, believing intercession the high honour of restoring His children to the life which He has meant for them.

Let each of us take a prayer-card, and write upon it the five points we have just mentioned. Let us think and pray over them until we realise that there is really something that needs praying for, and our hearts get so interested in it that prayer shall become the spontaneous expression of our strong desire for God's blessing on His Church.

CHAPTER XIX

FEAR NOT, ONLY BELIEVE

THERE is an easy optimism, that imagines that it is faith in God, and has a right and is able to claim every promise in God's Word. It does not understand how inseparably the words "Repent" and "Believe" are bound together. It has never learned how throughout Scripture a chief element in faith in God is a sense of impotence and utter helplessness. We want to speak here, as our book closes, on the place faith must have if we are indeed to go forward in the certain hope that in our own life, in the Church around us, and specially in its ministry, God's mighty power will be manifested, in working that deep, intense, living vitality which we are longing for. If we are to appropriate the words, "Fear not, only believe," as really spoken by our Lord to ourselves, we must note well the attitude of the man to whom they were first given.

We find here Jairus in great trouble; his little daughter is at the point of death. He falls at Christ's feet, and beseeches Him much to come and lay His hand on her. Jesus went with him.

But all at once there was an interruption, with the woman who touched the hem of Christ's garment, and Jairus fears lest they may come too late. His worst fears are realised. There come messengers to say: "Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master any further?" It was to such a man in his deep distress, beseeching Him greatly to come, and now brought to utter hopelessness by the tidings of her death, that Christ spake the word: "Fear not, only believe." The soil had been broken up deep; the heart was prepared to believe; Christ's precious word entered in and took possession. If we are bearing the burden of a dead or a dying Church, if we are going to take part in the work of rousing her and lifting her up into the abundant life that there is in Christ, we need nothing so much as a word like this. It will bring us the joyous assurance, day by day, that Christ is with us, that He will work through us and that we can count upon Him to give the blessing.

But we must take the place that Jairus did, falling at His feet, beseeching Him greatly, graciously, and mightily to interpose. Even when the tidings come, "There is no hope, death reigns, all our efforts are in vain," we are still to be of good cheer and hold on to His word. "Fear not, only believe," must be our watchword. But only —I say it once again—only to the man who tarries at Christ's feet in prayer, and looks to Him alone. There we shall learn that through-

out all Scripture it is faith, in the midst of seeming impossibility, that waits and claims the fulfilment of the promise.

Think of Abraham, "who waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform." It is as we persevere in prayer, and take hold of definite promises, and beseech Him greatly to fulfil them, that we shall through every obstacle hold fast our confidence to the end. We may find that as time goes on, as the insight into the deadly state of the Church grows deeper, and as experience teaches us how very hard it is to rouse Christians to the full meaning of, and the full surrender to, the claims of Christ, our hearts will often fail us for fear and grow faint. But if we have made our covenant with Christ that we dare not go back, but are determined to hold on, we shall find that just one word from our Lord hidden in the heart, and lived on day by day, will give strength in time of greatest darkness.

Just think of the words of Christ in regard to what appears to man to be impossible. He had said of the young ruler, "How hard it is for the rich to enter heaven." The disciples had said, "Who then can be saved?" Christ's answer was, "With men it is impossible," but, He added, "with God all things are possible." And elsewhere He said, "All things are possible to him that believeth." These words are a threefold cord that cannot be broken.

First, "With men it is impossible." It seems easy to say, and yet how difficult to realise it, and act it out. What is it that hinders the Church in this day from falling on its knees and beseeching God by His Holy Spirit to give revival? Nothing but this: men do not consider that the work that they have got to do is impossible with man. They consult, and organise, and labour, oh, so diligently, and yet the members decline by the thousand. And they cannot see that the work of winning men to become members of Christ and His Church is a work that God alone can do through men who have yielded themselves to the Holy Ghost. What a day that would be if the Church were to fall down before God, and bow in the dust with the cry: O God, it is impossible with man.

We should then be prepared for the second lesson, "But not with God,"—"all things are possible with God." At first sight this word also appears easy to accept. We are so sure that there is nothing impossible with such a God. And yet when we ask whether God's servants really believe it, and in the joyful confidence that He is going to do it, wait upon Him and expect His working, we soon find out how hard it is to get such an impression of God's power and His readiness to work out in us what He has bidden us to do. God is so little of a reality to us. How few the men are who take time with God that the blessed sense of His holy presence can

fill their hearts and strengthen them in their work.

Oh, all ye who are beginning to take the state of the Church to heart, and to bear it as a burden before the Lord, be not surprised if you have found it a hard thing. Fully to grasp the truth in regard to the objects of your labour and your prayer, "With God all things are possible," learn the lesson of bringing that blessed truth into contact with your daily prayer and your daily work. Let its light shine into your heart, on your sphere of labour, on the Church around you, on the feeblest and most hopeless part of the Church, until all your thoughts have this as their keynote, "**But not with God.**" "All things are possible with God." He is able to rouse the Church out of her apathy, and lift Christians into the abundant life.

But now comes the third and most difficult lesson: "All things are possible to him that believeth." It is something great to really believe that all things are possible with God. And yet the soul may be troubled as to how and when it may come. This word of Christ throws the responsibility on ourselves. It is to him that believes that God makes all things possible. When Christ spoke that word to the father of the lunatic, the man felt so deeply his responsibility, if he should not have the needful faith, that he cried out, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." And Christ heard that

prayer. He is still waiting, when our hearts shrink back from the thought, "Is it going to depend upon me whether this mighty God will do the impossible thing? I dare not bear the burden of this responsibility," to strengthen our faith. He Who helped the father of the lunatic child, He Who said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," Jesus Christ, who became man to bring us into fellowship with the omnipotent God, He will give us the confidence to believe that it is God's will: "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will." Let us live in fellowship with Christ, Who spake these words; He will enable us to receive them until they become the joy and the strength of our heart.

If I have not succeeded in this little book in giving a deep impression of the sore need of the Holy Spirit and its power that the state of the Church demands, I should feel that I had failed of my purpose. But I should be still more disappointed if I were to part with the reader without having helped him to the confident assurance that God is able and willing in answer to prayer to work revival, and to fill the hearts of many of His children with a measure of the Holy Spirit such as they have never known. As we look out upon a Church so feeble and faithless as we have seen, do let us listen to the voice of Jesus as He says, "Fear not, only believe." What I have already said, I say again:

The Church around you may be in a dying state, with no possibility of being reached by human effort. I beseech you, Look up to God; tarry before Him in prayer until stronger desire is stirred, and faith rises to link itself to His omnipotence. Believe in the power of our Lord Jesus, and in His tender relationship to you, watching over your faith. Believe in the power of the Holy Ghost, the promise of the Father, the birthright of the Church, surrounding you on every side, and longing to get possession of you and those for whom you are praying. And so let the study of the state of the Church give you a knowledge of God and a trust in Him, beyond what you have ever known or thought.

CHAPTER XX

A PERSONAL WORD

WE are about to part. Before we do so, I am most anxious, if it were possible, to buttonhole my reader, and to ask him to come to a decision in regard to the great unsolved problem that is before the Church. In the very first Call to Prayer for the Edinburgh Conference the expression occurred, "The Christian experience of the Church is not **deep, intense, and living enough** to meet the world's need." In previous chapters of this book quotations have been given from the different speakers, emphasising, especially on the last days of the Conference, the thought that the Church has not the vitality and devotion needed for the tremendous task to which it is called. In the Reports of the Conference, one finds an answer to every possible question in regard to what can be done to carry on the work effectually, with the exception of just this all-important one, **how the Church can be lifted up into a fuller spiritual life?** One had hoped that the Conference would in direct appeal to the Churches have pressed home the question, and

pointed out the path in which the hope of deliverance is to be found. But it did not feel itself called to, and leaves now the unanswered question to the individual conscience of each believer. I make bold to plead with my reader to take up the question, until he realises its tremendous solemnity, and resolve that he at least will yield himself a living sacrifice for God to use for that great work. I would ask every child of God carefully to consider the following points:—

1. Will you not take time and thought and prayer to come under the full sense of the terrible position? Two-thirds of the world still without the knowledge of Christ. The Church created, and set apart, and endued with the Spirit, with the one object of making Christ known to every human being without delay. The great majority of Christians utterly indifferent, a considerable number apparently willing to help, but utterly unconscious of the urgency of the need, or the solemn responsibility resting upon them. A very small number seeking at any cost to yield themselves to fulfil their Lord's command. God in heaven holding His omnipotence at the disposal of the faith and prayer of His people, but hindered by their unbelief. And Christ the Lord grieved, oh, so grieved, because His love is so little known and honoured by His people, and so little made known to those whom it longs to reach.

I ask you, will you not turn aside from the world and from men, to take up this burden of the Lord, and wait upon God to see if He cannot use you to help His Church to some right sense of shame and contrition for all this sinful neglect? I know of no other way of restoration, than a beginning made by individual men and women pleading on behalf of the Church with God, and pleading on behalf of God with men. I plead with you, pointedly and personally, **will you not be one?**

2. You may feel as if you yourself have not the enthusiasm or the faith for such an undertaking. You are not conscious that you have power with God as an intercessor. You fear that you may not be faithful in fulfilling your vow, or in yourself attaining that more abundant life to which you are asked to help to lift up the Church.

I beseech you, do not give way to such thoughts. What is needed is just this one thing: Are you willing **to yield yourself up to God for His Holy Spirit to get entire possession of you?** This is surely what every Christian ought to seek. Read Chapter XII., on the "Promise of the Father." Give time and heart to meditate on the wonderful mysteries: the Holy Spirit of God given to fill you with a Divine life; the heavenly Father inconceivably willing to bestow the gift; the blessed Lord ready to teach you to pray and to lead you in the path which

He went, through the death of the Cross to the fulness of the Spirit; and your prayer that can work the mighty wonder and bring the fulness of the Spirit. Just take Christ's lesson of a simple childlike confidence trusting a father, and the importunate persistency pleading with a friend, and prove God if He will not pour out a blessing. Oh, remember, if you fail, you will be keeping open the path in which others fail too. If you be strong and of good courage, God will assuredly use you to help others.

I know no solution of the tremendous problem, how the Church is to be lifted up into a fuller spiritual life, than this **Let each of us give himself for God to use.** God is eager and able to do something for us that we have never yet known. Read Isaiah vi. until all your conscious impotence has been first deepened, but then conquered, by the thought of the Holy God cleansing you with His fire. Oh, prepare yourself to say, "Here am I, here am I."

3. Then comes a third thought. In the Conference Report it is said: "There can be no forward movement in Missions except as this is attained through a deepening of the spiritual life of the leaders of the Church, and a real spiritual revival among the members. The one real lack to-day is a lack of spiritual life; the one great need the realisation of the constant presence and power of the Holy Spirit."

It is this we need to pray for, a revival of true

spiritual life. Not, in the first place, a revival among the unconverted. God has given that in the past years, but it is as if the Missions have not that access or hold that they had formerly. It is as if God sees that the Church is not living on the high spiritual level that fits her for bearing and rearing strong spiritual Christians. The converts come too much under the influence of a feeble spiritual life, and too many sink into worldliness and indifference. What we must plead with God for is such a mighty quickening of the power of the eternal life in the hearts of His children, nothing less than the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, as shall give them the intense devotion which marks the true health of the soul. I have spoken of the three circles in every congregation: the larger outer one of the scarcely saved, the smaller inner one of the truly devoted, and then the middle one of those who are ever longing for a better life, and yet are so bound in their impotence that they know nothing of true victory. Let us think specially of these, and plead for them that men may be raised up, full of faith and the Holy Ghost, with the power to lead them to such a vision of Christ as shall make Him become at once to them the object of a glad and complete surrender, and the assurance of an all-sufficient strength for their life in His service.

I plead with you to pray for Missions in all their different interests, as never before. Yield yourselves to the Holy Ghost for this work of

intercession. And beseech God fervently that He will in your congregation bring His children to such a life in Christ as shall make them a willing people in the day of His power. Set your heart upon this; give God no rest until His Spirit moves among His children in mighty power.

Cherish carefully the thought that you have yielded yourself to God to be set apart as an intercessor, that He will work in you all the grace needed and give you the blessed assurance that you have power with Him. Live in the bold and holy confidence that God is ready through you to bless His Church.

4. As this consciousness becomes stronger you will be able to speak with others and to testify, in the power of the Spirit, of how really God is only waiting for prayer to give the blessing. Try and gather others who are of the same spirit, for conference and prayer. Help each other to realise that you are **definitely and persistently expecting God to lift His Church into the abundant life,** and cry day and night for it. Help all to feel that this is **first of all the object of definite secret prayer.** That will be the proof that the life has now been given up to the Holy Spirit, and let united prayer then be a witness to God and your own heart that you are sure that secret prayer will be answered.

If you are a minister, try and find brethren who will give themselves to this great work in the spirit of entire self-sacrifice, of confident faith, of

importunate prayer. Help each of them to come to the full sense of his calling, and the confident assurance that God will hear. "If the Conference in Edinburgh should lead some **resolutely and irrevocably** into the school of prayer, the spiritual power of the Church for the accomplishment of its great task would be immeasurably increased." Do believe that to take part in such ministry of prayer will be to you the beginning of a new life, of blessing and strength.

Let me beseech all my readers, men and women, children of God, as they lay aside the book, not to refuse the pleading with which it closes, but to say to God whether they do now present themselves **as a holy sacrifice to be at His disposal for the work of His Spirit.** Let each one say "Here am I," till his whole being bows before God in the living conviction, "God accepts me, God enables me, God will bless me. What He has never been able to do before through me, He can and will do now. I am His for the great work of helping to lift His Church into the fuller life which cannot but overflow in blessing to a perishing world."

And let each one of us pray that God may bless every reader who has joined in the surrender with a new discovery of what God will do through him too.

Farewell. Remember, everything depends in the first instance on the individual yielding himself up.

HINTS ON INTERCESSION

Intercession to be effectual must be intelligent, definite, believing, and persevering. First of all, intelligent. That means that I am not to be content with what others think or write, but to set myself with all my heart to realise what it is that I am asking for. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind and with all thy strength." That applies to prayer too. Let us apply it to the great unsolved problem that has been occupying us, and now calls for our prayers: How can the Church be lifted up out of her low spiritual state, into the abundant life that there is in Christ Jesus?

If one is really to pray with effect, he must prove to God that he feels grieved at that low spiritual condition of the Church, and that he has set his heart upon the blessing of that abundant life that there is in Christ.

Just think a moment of the proofs we have had of that feeble life.

1. We have the verdict of the Conference that the Church as a whole is indifferent to the call to the work for which she was placed in the world, and so is spiritually unfit for taking part in it.

2. We have the confession in the Churches of their decline in membership as a proof that they are not able to drive back the spirit of the world.

3. Both these symptoms indicate a lack of spiritual life and power.

4. And with this there is the absolute impossibility of doing anything to bring about a change.

Take time and think out these thoughts. Pray to God to give you a vision of their terrible reality, the grief and dishonour they are to Him, the terrible loss of souls that they imply, and the part that you have in it all. Begin to admit what a great work it is that you are undertaking, to pray for that great revolution which is needed if a change is to come. Pray for your ministers, pray for your congregation, pray for the believers with whom you have fellowship in prayer, pray for your whole Church, that God may show us all what really the true state of the Church is. Unless we are willing to take time, to turn aside from the world, to give ourselves to the holy exercise of labouring and striving in prayer, we have no right to hope for deliverance. It is a hard work, a difficult work, a solemn work. But let us not try to serve God with what costs us nothing. It cost Christ everything, His blood and His life, to conquer death, and win for us a share in His abundant life. God's intercessors must learn in deep humility and contrition really to give their whole life and strength to bear the burden of the state of their fellow-Christians, if they are to have power to prevail.

And now, let us look on the other side, the abundant life that is waiting for the Church, and see what ground there is for faith and hope in prayer.

1. What is impossible with men is possible with God. God has given to His Church the promise of the Holy Spirit, as the Divine power which will fit her for the work she has to do. The more we study carefully the state of the Church, the unspiritual worldly life of the majority of her members, the lack of power in her ministers, even

many of those who long for better times, the tremendous difficulty of rousing even a single congregation to a higher spiritual life, the deeper shall we feel how hopeless the prospect is of a true deep revival in which Christians shall really yield themselves wholly to a new life in Christ Jesus. But just let this impossibility be what drives us into the arms of God, and into a new faith of what He can do.

2. Think of how Christ has promised that the Father should give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it. Think of that, until your whole heart is filled with the assurance, God will, God can, God must, we say it with reverence, give His Spirit where His believing people unite in whole-hearted prayer and consecration.

3. With this, think of the very special power that has been given to prayer, and the boundless possibilities to which it gives us the key. Take time, if you want to exercise yourself in prayer, and learn the art—take time, and let all the promises of answer to prayer fill you with the confident assurance of what is going to come. This is one of the great privileges of prayer, that it throws you upon God, and opens the heart for God to make His promises a personal gift to yourself.

4. Begin then and take time, and just as you studied the state of the Church in its feebleness and sin, begin to study God's Word as if for the first time you were trying to find out what God really has promised to do for His Church here upon earth. Take Christ's teaching in John xiv.–xvi., and believe that the power of the Holy Spirit is meant to make the promise, "If ye love Me, My Father will love you, and I will love you, and we will come and make our abode with you," a literal reality. Take the experience of Paul in all that

Christ did for him, and regard that as a pattern of what God is willing to do now. And set yourself steadfastly to ask God definitely to work in you, and those around you, and in His Church in its low estate, what He has promised. Do not rest until the vision of what God is willing to do fill your heart so that you can think of nothing else. You have given your whole life to be occupied with this as its chief aim; rest not until your heart is fully possessed with it.

Then you will be prepared to take your place as an intercessor in power. Your prayers will become more intelligent, but also more fervent, more believing, more persevering. You will begin to understand something of what prayer means in its fulness—a taking hold of God, a giving Him no rest, a going on to be importunate in prayer, until your faith receives the quiet assurance that God will give what you are asking.

Pray, above all, for the gift of the Holy Spirit to have entire possession of you, and of all God's children who are pleading with you for the new life. Pray fervently, determinedly, for the ministers who are willing to yield themselves to God's work. Pray for all ministers as the leaders of the flock of God. Give yourself as a whole sacrifice to God for the great work of seeking the revival of His Church, and through her the evangelisation of the world.

God seeks intercessors. God has need of intercessors. God wonders at the lack of intercessors. Rest not till God sees that you are one.

Printed by Morrison & Gibb Limited, *Edinburgh*

Nazarene Theological College
WITHDRAWN
B09180

Books are to be returned on or before
the last date below

30 MAR 1978

12 DEC 1984

LIBREX—

242
M981s
3322

Murray

BRITISH ISLES NAZARENE LIBRARY COLLEGE

WITHDRAWN